

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

# NAG

PC PLAYSTATION XBOX WII MOTHER

**REVIEWS**

**THE GODFATHER II**

**AFRO SAMURAI**

**X-MEN ORIGINS:**

**WOLVERINE**

**UNCAGED EDITION**

## MODERN WARFARE

# 2

# Q&A

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**GHOSTBUSTERS  
PREVIEW**

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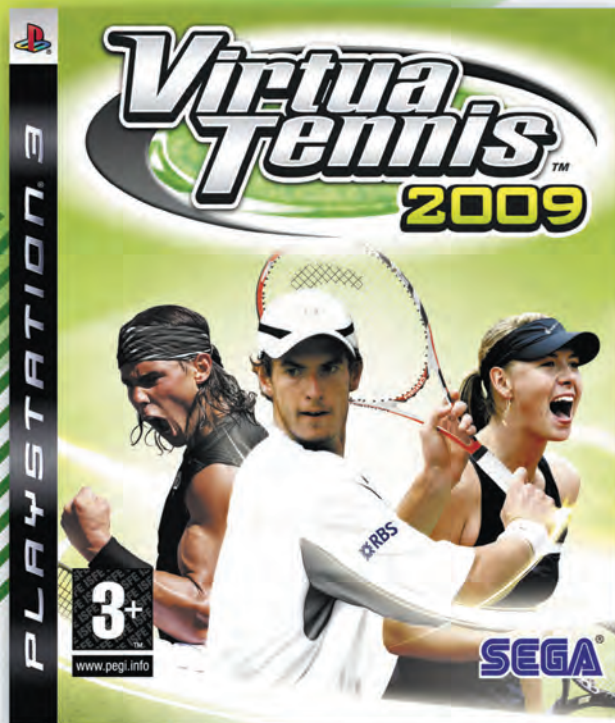
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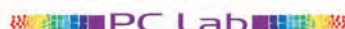
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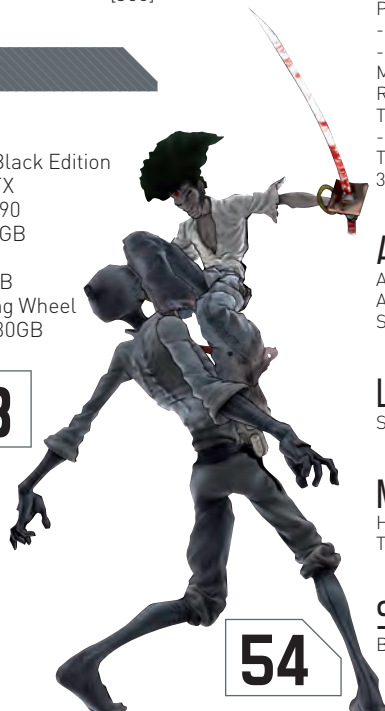
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## On the DVD



### Demos

Battlestations: Pacific | Braid | Buccaneer: The Pursuit of Infamy | Cryostasis: The Sleep of Reason [Tech Demo] | Defense Grid: The Awakening | Plants vs. Zombies | Puzzle Kingdoms | X-Blades | Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II [requires Steam]

### Drivers

ATI Catalyst Drivers 9.4 Vista & XP | NVIDIA ForceWare 182.50 WHQL Vista & XP

### Extras

CheatBook Database 2009 + Updates to April 2009 | Call of Duty: World at War - Zombie Map | Judith | PSP Firmware Update 5.50 | SACM Switched On Podcast #12 | The Game Developer's Starter Kit | Unreal Tournament III - The Haunted Mod v1.02

### Patches

Call of Duty: World at War - Patch v1.2 to v1.4 | Company of Heroes - Patch v2.501 to v2.502 | Far Cry 2 - Patch v1.02 | S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky - Patch v1.5.09 (Retail) | Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. - Patch v1.02 | Unreal Tournament III - Patch 5

### Game Videos

10 years of EverQuest - Dragon's Trailer | Assassin's Creed 2 - Debut Teaser Trailer | Batman Arkham Asylum - Bane | Batman Arkham Asylum - Challenge Room Trailer | Batman Arkham Asylum - Freeform Combat | Battlefield 1943 - Wake Island Trailer | Battlefield Bad Company 2 - Debut Trailer | Battlefield Heroes - PC Beta Trailer | Bayonetta - First Climax Trailer | Bionic Commando - Lab Report 01 Bionic Arm | BioShock 2 - Debut Game Footage | BlazBlue - Drive Trailer | Brutal Legend - Story Trailer | Burnout Paradise Cops and Robbers - Launch Trailer | Burnout Paradise Cops and Robbers - Teaser Trailer | Champions Online - Swinging Trailer | Comet Crash - Swarm Game Footage | Crysis Wars - Church | Demigod - Game Footage | Demigod - Rook Footage | Dissidia Final Fantasy - US Debut Trailer | Dragon Age Origins - Mage Trailer | Dragon Age Origins - Red Cliff Trailer | Dragonball Evolution - Game Footage | End of Eternity - Japanese Debut Trailer | Evangelion - Japanese Debut Trailer | ExciteBots Trick Racing - Single-player Footage | Exploredemon Trailer | Fallout 3 The Pitt - Game Footage | Fat Princess - Game Footage | Fight Night Round 4 - Game Footage | Final Fantasy Versus XIII Trailer | Final Fantasy XIII - Behemoth Boss Footage | Flight - Debut Teaser Trailer | Full Metal Alchemist - Japanese Debut Trailer | Furry Legends - Debut Teaser Trailer | G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra Trailer | Killzone 2 - Art Director Commentary | Killzone 2 - Director Commentary | Lode Runner Trailer | Magna Carta 2 - Japanese Debut Trailer | Magna Carta 2 - Producer Interview | Majesty 2 - Power Sentinels Trailer | Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2 - Iron Fist Trailer | Midnight Club Los Angeles - South Central Trailer | Muramasa Demon Blade - Game Footage 2 | Overlord Minions - Debut Trailer | Patapon 2 - Multiplayer Trailer | Plants vs. Zombies - Music Video | Project Cube - Japanese Debut Trailer | Prototype - Mighty Montage Trailer | Prototype - Missions Trailer | Punch Out - Series Evolution Trailer | Ratchet & Clank Future - A Crack in Time - Teaser | Rhythm Heaven - Launch Trailer | Spore Galactic Adventures - Lead Producer Interview | Spore Galactic Adventures - Super Weapon Trailer | Stalin vs. Martians - Music Video | Star Wars The Old Republic - Timeline Trailer | StarCraft 2 - Battle Report 1 | StarCraft 2 - Battle Report 2 | Stormrise - City Footage | Tales of Graces - Debut Trailer | Tales of VS - Debut Trailer | Tekken 6 - Director Interview | Terminator Salvation - 2016 Trailer | The Conduit - A.S.E. Trailer | Trine - Game Footage | Uncharted 2 Among Thieves - Multiplayer Trailer | Unreal Engine 3 - GDC 09 | WET - Debut Game Footage | Xbox 360 - Spring Preview Montage | Zombie Apocalypse - Mini-gun Footage

### April Fools' Videos

Alpine Legend | Diablo III - Archivist Hush | Diablo III - Archivist Quest Bolt | Diablo III - Archivist Tornado | Dragon Age Origins | Metal Gear Solid 4 | StarCraft 2 - Terratron 1 | StarCraft 2 - Terratron 2

### LOL Video

Shii

### Movies Trailers

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince  
Transformers 2 Trailer HD

### ScrewAttack VideoGame Vault Videos

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# My precious



This new, better thing is shattering my precious nostalgic memories

**I**N MY OPINION (EVEN though it's been out for a while already), the new *Star Trek* movie is simply flawless. I've seen it three times already. And no, I don't own any plastic Spock ears. Go see it. However, if you're one of those anal fans, rather stick to your yellowing VHS tapes of the original series – you wouldn't like all the beautiful SFX and the retooling of the whole *Star Trek* universe.

I was reading a lot of forum posts over at [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com) about this movie, and was surprised to see how many people are complaining about the most ridiculous things: too cheesy; too much humour; not philosophical enough; too much time travel; the black hole science is wrong; Vulcan eyebrows are bushier... I'm sure you get the idea.

This got me pondering and wondering about the gaming industry... Of course, this is what I do. You never compare the old versions of games to the new ones when some development company decides to reboot a franchise a few years later. As an example, think about *Wolfenstein*. How many millions of polygons better is the reboot compared to the original blocky version? I don't remember anyone complaining about the bigger levels, better sound, better control, better graphics and improved story. But just dare release a better movie than the old one, and everyone has something to say. Naturally, the jump in computer technology is more visually striking and contributes to this overall improvement. So, why doesn't it also apply to the movie industry? An industry that is always improving and innovating when it comes to special effects, sound, lighting, etc.

But back to *Wolfenstein*... Do we just accept a completely different game in a completely different setting because the old version is so old and terrible that almost anything is an improvement? It appears that movies have a much longer lifespan, and that – in general – the majority of people will agree that a reboot is better than the original. I wonder when it would be acceptable to do a remake of *Star Wars IV*. When would it be acceptable to do a remake of something current – such as *Dead Space* – in the gaming industry? Would the time gap between remakes lengthen to the same for movies, or would games just keep accelerating in quality so that this never happens? It's a point that can be argued on both sides, so send anything you want to get off your mind to the usual address – and don't hold back...

## RAGE 2009...

Right, it's all happening at the Dome at Northgate from 2 to 4 October 2009. This year (the seventh) is looking very good so far with a bigger LAN, more games to play on the show floor, more international developers jetting in to talk about their latest titles, and just more of everything really. Keep an eye out for announcements in the next issue of *NAG* and everywhere else. Moreover, in the July issue, we'll be giving away two tickets to the *NAG* LAN. So, stay tuned. Hooray!

Enjoy the issue

Michael James  
Editor



## Cover Story

There was never going to be any question about *Modern Warfare 2* appearing on the cover of *NAG*. This iconic FPS series has eaten away more time at the *NAG* office than any other franchise (embarrassingly, *Quake III Arena* is a close second). Anyway, Miktar travelled to Infinity Ward (California) and bagged a major scoop on *Modern Warfare 2*. The original article was only supposed to be six pages, but Miktar penned a ten-page feature and managed to dig up a lot of exclusive content. The only thing he was 'firewalled' on was the multiplayer stuff (so more on that later in the year). He also asked the difficult question about a zombie mode – thanks for taking one for the team there, Miktar. :) Here's a huge thanks to Andrew from Megarom, the Activision | Blizzard PR people and, of course, the guys at Infinity Ward. Keep your eyes open for more information when we get it... Yazoo!

## And our big wiener is...

The winner of the April 'white-hot gaming rig' competition is Johan Stoltz from Roodepoort. Well done, dude! Please remember, we're still collecting all the parts for the prize and this could take up to four weeks. You will get the prize as soon as we have put it all together. So, don't NAG us... :)

# NAG

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## Letter of the Moment

**FROM:** Andrew

**SUBJECT:** Poor pirates

**"I'VE OWNED MY XBOX 360** for about a year and a half now and ever since I got it, the bad influence side of my friends have been trying to get me to flash it so I could play copied games. They laugh at me when I pay R700 for a game. Now instead of hitting them with a rolled up news paper and shouting 'bad dog!', I actually pity them. Yes, that's right, I feel for them. The reason for this is that they don't really get to experience the games. Every other week (a) new game(s) is released and they're on their machines downloading and burning the games without ever finishing the last one they downloaded. They truly miss out. They hardly ever finish any of the games, thus losing a lot of what the game has to offer. One of them only finished Gears of War 1 the other day, and he's had it since it was released! They don't replay games to get a different perspective on the game. Thus, I pity these poor guys for not knowing how awesome some games are. For never being really immersed in a virtual reality that took developers months of passion to put together. I play games to escape, these guys never give the games the chance to offer them that escape. Poor sods..."

*You are so right about this. When I first started gaming (on the Commodore 64 and eventually the Amiga 500), you couldn't even find games to buy in South Africa. So, I pirated everything from friends and shady acquaintances. I experienced the exact same thing: extreme oversupply with little to no enjoyment. I never actually finished a lot of great games and instead just flitted over everything, hungry for the next quick fix. Oddly, I find myself in the exact same position today (with endless magazine review samples ;)). Pirating games will eventually ruin gaming for life for you. Here, have a free game for doing the right thing, and be sure to rub this in the face of those misinformed buddies of yours. Ed*

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**FROM:** Lein

**SUBJECT:** Consequences

**"THE LETTER OF THE** moment in your March edition (Freedom – Good or Bad)) raised a point that I've been thinking about for a while. As an avid RPG gamer, too often I find myself bored and looking elsewhere with such titles, due to the 'freedom' they give you. It all tends to come down to: get side-quest and then, (a) retrieve item, or (b) kill person, which usually involves your running around hacking everything that moves to pieces in a monster infested area. Return for reward, rinse and repeat. It becomes formulaic. Never mind that while you go off saving the masses from every broken door hinge the cataclysmic event that threatens Armageddon is put on hold. It just doesn't seem right. My belief is that

adding a timeline, in which major plot events happen whether you're ready or not would combat this. It adds a sense of urgency to everything you do, as while as maybe raising a few dilemmas. Sure go ahead and save the treasured family heirloom that generic NPC A has begged of you to do. Just beware that while you're off the threatened mass destruction might occur without you there to stop it. In other words consequences must be attached to your actions. One a final note, thanks for all the great work done on the magazine!"

*That's a great idea but probably won't work. Who wants to be under pressure when playing a game? I think most RPG nuts enjoy killing rats and bugs for hours on end while they slowly build their characters into gods – there's a whole human condition linked to this. I think your idea would work very well in the scenario where the consequences of your actions (or inactions) were just very inconvenient. Nice one. Ed.*

**FROM:** Phillip

**SUBJECT:** Just like pie!

**"GAMES TO ME ARE** just like pies. People enjoy it and love it and there are some people who don't like it (stupid people). There are a lot of different types. Some can turn you into a zombie (but it only occurs in Lithuania) and some might even make you smarter. You get ones which are heavenly and you get ones which are shockingly bad. I hate the ones which present themselves as heavenly and end up being bad and filled with bugs, as it lets me know that I have made a bad purchase. Can't the makers taste anymore? Can't they see that it is terrible? With bad games appearing everywhere, what are the ingredients to an excellent game? I like ones made with 3 cups of storytelling, 3 swords, 2 teaspoons of fun and a sprinkle of innovation. Baked in the CD drive for 4 hours and enjoyed by those who can clearly taste it was made with love. What are your favourite ingredients?"

*Ingenious metaphors aside, we also like pie. Here's the list from some of the people at the office in case anyone wants to buy us all a pie one day. Geoff: Woolworths Roast Chicken | Dane: Cheese Burger | Michael: Chicken & Mushroom | Jacqui: Cornish | Regardt: Cheese | Alex: Cottage | Chris: American Apple | Junior: Tiropita | Neo: Spinach Pie | Cheryl: Pecan Nut | Dave: Pepper Steak | Nati: Cornish | Lauren: Chicken & Mushroom. The soft drinks list is also available on request. Ed.*

**FROM:** Vernon

**SUBJECT:** Good times

**"APRIL 2007 – BOY!** What a stellar month that was for NAG. What was it – 172 pages of 'pure awesomeness' – well it has gotten much better since in terms of design and contents but it certainly seems to have dropped the printer's tray in terms

of thickness. Even 140 pages would be acceptable, but this hovering around 100 or less is just, well – not awesome. I find it frustrating to be finished with my NAG before the new month even get started – certainly there can be more bytes, more hardware, more gadgets, (throw in some more ads for you guys) and maybe reading NAG can be stretched into the first week of the new month. Of course the magazine will never last the whole month no matter how carefully one tries to space his reading of it simply because of NAG's sheer awesomeness. We just want more of it at a time. And please bring back the RRP in the hardware section – it is a key orientation point regarding said hardware, i.e. can I afford it or need I consider organ donation..."

*I'd also love to get those extra 72 pages back into NAG... However, currently we're a little light on advertising and we keep suffering under ridiculous printing costs each month. This whole recession business has taken a small bite out of the backside of the gaming industry (mostly hardware), but for the most part, we're all doing fine. NAG has unfortunately suffered a little, but I'd rather put out a smaller issue each month instead of six huge ones and then disappear forever. As for your other comment, we're looking into the hardware pricing. It's difficult because prices change every week, and we end up with endless complaints from readers and distributors when we get it wrong. I am thinking about indicating a price range instead of trying to nail it down exactly. Ed*

**FROM:** Jeremy

**SUBJECT:** Videogames – Escape or Reality?

**"VIDEOGAMES AND THE VIDEO** game industry as a whole are developing at an astonishing rate, and along with these developments, come changes in game developers and titles to harness the power of the 'current-generation' systems which inhabit the shelves of every store, and specifically, the shelves of bedrooms and lounges of the gamers. With graphical and gameplay constantly updating and becoming more and more 'realistic'... is this what games really want? I mean, one hears the constant complaints of 'that's so unrealistic', 'that could never happen' or 'a plumber could never shoot fireballs'; but in reality (excuse the pun) aren't video games supposed to be an escape from reality? Being able to do things we cannot do in everyday life gives games the freedom and creativity which is so stifled in today's society. The quest for realism has its place in gaming – don't get me wrong, it's so refreshing to see games such as Call of Duty 4, pushing the limits of realism, showing not all terrorists can take 50 bullets to the head while constantly shooting a never ending barrage of missiles out of a stereotypical rocket launcher. This letter may be beginning to sound contradictory, but my point is that gamers must enjoy games for



## NAG Fan artwork

This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo, you might also end up here for your three lines of fame.



**Hubert Knoblauch:**  
"I work in the product design industry where mechanical 3D is the order of the day, needless to say, spare time is devoted to more 'informal' 3D such as the attached image of the NAG HERBIE beetle. I have been working on it over the last few months and all parts from chassis, steering column, Diff, even light bulbs are done."



**Luke St.quentin:**  
"NAG magazine is without a doubt the best piece of literature ever published, period. My love for this magazine has driven me to create this piece of fan art though it doesn't even begin to depict the awesomeness that is NAG, but I tried."

what they are. There are obviously fantasy games and realistic simulators, the presentations offer an obvious solution to the debate and there are people who love either genre. So the question is, should people stop criticizing and analyzing the 'realism' of every new game out there? Or accept every game and praise their surreal creativity?"

*The problem here is your basic off-the-shelf common human being – the same ones who have been complaining about things since the dawn of humankind. These same people will probably be doing it right at the end of civilisation too, and as the giant asteroid slams into the Earth's crust, they'll be like, "Well... I was expecting a little more fire, or something." Moreover, if people just accepted everything in life, there wouldn't be any religious wars or customer complaint lines. Ed.*

**FROM:** Desmond  
**SUBJECT:** Invitation  
**"THIS LETTER IS EXTENDED** to all who want to become game designers or all who want to become. I am not a designer by profession but like most have been told to try it on my own. So I'd like to extend this invitation to all whom are interested. Even if my letter does not make it to the magazine please put out this invitation."

*Attention: to all of those people out there who want to become game designers (or just want to 'become'), Desmond has invited you. Ed.*

**FROM:** Kalvin  
**SUBJECT:** Glitches...  
**"I WAS PLAYING COD 5** the other day, and me being me, I wanted to see the game's limitations. I noticed how the sticky-grenades in some areas get stuck in mid-air, and how the dogs manage to stick half way out of a stair case. As games get more advanced and well designed, glitches are less noticeable, but I'm sure that they won't be removed all together... Not many people worry about that stuff but I'd like to see what the designers missed out on. What does NAG stand for?"

*I doubt that any game ever released will ever be completely error free. There are just too many combinations of things that can go wrong in modern games. It's also just too easy to patch a game after release these days and let the public 'beta test' it for free. NAG used to be an acronym for New Age Gaming. However, this was long ago and nobody really remembers what the deeper meaning was. Everyone used to call it NAG anyway, so now it's just NAG magazine. I think the 'New Age' part scared some people off. Ed. **NAG***

## On The Forums

**QUESTION:** 3D Realms – creators of *Duke Nukem Forever*, *Bio Menace*, *Rise of the Triad* and *Shadow Warrior*, and publishers of *Terminal Velocity*, *Max Payne* and *Prey* – have shut down. What are your thoughts?

**Cloud\_Ratha:** "If I found out that Duke Nukem Forever actually would never see the light of day, I'd have to change the name I'm saving for my first born."

**brazed:** "Who?"

**-Bouncer-:** "I was right about them. No wonder, they take forever to 'release' a game."

**01DT!m3r:** "Thank god. Now maybe Valve can grab the rights and actually finish the game. It has taken forever (da dum tiss)."

**Toi:** "I would just wonder how long ago they already knew that Duke Nukem would never see the light of day yet they still give us hope."

**KFC:** "Maybe there never was a Duke Nukem Forever?"

**Fox:** "lol 3D Realms finally figured out that they can't make money of a 10 year old April fools joke."

**Kharrak:** "Looks like Duke Nukem Forever really Did Not Finish after all..."

**Wesley:** "It's their own fault, really. 3D Realms should have committed themselves to the market and gamers they serve when they announced Forever – lately they've just been wasting everyone's time and money... I've seen some videos lately that are believed to be gameplay ones, but I'll keep my excitement in check until something's actually announced. Btw, after a ten year development cycle, that game better be bloody perfect, or else..."

**Sabazios:** "But it sucks that 3D Realms shut down: ( they were awesome back in the day..it would have been an awesome game, that's if they were ever actually planning to release it."

**Graal:** "It's those nasty little police pigs. When they saw Duke Nukem Forever was being developed after all they decided to shut down the studio, killing the game once and for all."

**echo:** "It's a sad day. But hopefully they can sell the IP (DNF) to someone with better management/planning skills. BORN TO BE WIIIIILD!"

**DukeOfPrunes:** "It's sad really. The folks at 3D Realms have given us gamers some pretty awesome ways to avoid being social, spending time with family or studying. I for one shall miss seeing that big-ass 3D Realms logo splashed on my screen right before I get to shoot something... and for those that feel vindicated in some way due to the DNF debacle, forget about it. It's really not worth getting all twisted up about."

**Sir PaniCore:** "Maybe a company can come and buy the license to Duke Nukem Forever and we can finally play the damn thing. The company used to be one of the best but now lately the company has just been a muck of Epic Fail."

**Cleric:** "Can't make money if you're not selling anything. Serves them right."

**Tryxst3r:** "You can't miss what you never knew."

**..Enigma..:** "Duke Nukem Forever. See how they included the waiting period for the game in the name? Forever. Too bad their gone.. Now we just have to wait for somebody to take over and give us another 10 years wait."

**Tieron:** "if I were them, I'd re-release DN3D as download only, but rename it DNF... then giggle while sneaking away after wasting millions of poor hopeful gamers' bandwidth.... mwahahahahahaha!!!! it's what they've been planning all along I tell you.... evil bastards"





# RIP 3D Realms

Duke Nukem creators say a sad farewell

**3D REALMS, THE DEVELOPERS** behind *Duke Nukem Forever*, has closed. Sources claim a lack of funding to be the cause, which is not overly surprising considering *Duke's* 12-year development cycle that ultimately produced nothing but a handful of leaked screenshots and a couple of videos. This is indeed a sad day for old-school and modern gamers alike, as 3D Realms not only produced (as either developer or publisher) some of the most iconic titles of our time, such as the *Commander Keen* series, the original *Duke Nukem* games, *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Raptor: Call of the Shadows*, but also gave life to titles such as *Max Payne* and *Prey*, which will likely stand the test of time (as well as the older titles). The studio, which also operated under the name Apogee, teamed up with developers and publishers for decades to bring their visions to light no matter what, as was evident with *Prey* (which was handed over to Human Head Studios after almost a decade of inactivity). What this boils down to is perhaps a glimmer of hope for the world's most

infamous FPS, *Duke Nukem Forever*, which is legally owned by publisher Take-Two Interactive. While the company has been officially closed, as the brief farewell message on their Website states, there will still be legal and financial cogs turning in the background for some months to come – a company with a portfolio this big won't just disappear overnight. We're hoping that, if anything, this sad 'occurrence' will result in *DNF* being handed over to a studio more committed to seeing its release this side of the colonisation of Mars, and that the unemployed developers left over from 3D Realms will find or form new studios where their creative abilities won't be bogged down in decade(s)-long development cycles.

It's been made clear that the closure won't affect Deep Silver's September release of *Duke Nukem Trilogy* for the PSP and DS. *Prey 2* also remains safe after the licence to publish the title was bought by IP Management Company to once again be developed by Human Head Studios.

## UNCHARTED 2 GETS SOCIAL

*Uncharted 2*, the sequel to 2007's hugely popular action adventure for the PS3, will have a multiplayer mode. Three of them, to be precise. Kicking things off is the much talked about co-op mode, but this one (so far, at least) seems to be a little tacked on. Instead of allowing multiple players simultaneous access to the regular single-player campaign, there will be specific co-op-only stages in the game that will require up to three players to work together to accomplish their goals, and will include multiplayer puzzle elements in addition to the usual combat. There will also be two versus modes – team deathmatch and capture the flag. CTF (or "Plunder") has been given a bit of a makeover to keep things fresh, requiring players to lug a large, unwieldy idol between bases to score points, armed only with a handgun while doing so.



## LEGO Rock Band

Here are two things that are great in this world: *LEGO* and *Rock Band*. Here is a single thing that has us highly concerned about the mental state of everyone at Harmonix: *LEGO Rock Band*. That's right, Harmonix and publisher MTV Games have finally cracked and are preparing to release a game in which you play as a group of toys playing as a band. And while we're expectantly worried that this will be ridiculous, one can't argue with the rationale driving this combination of brands. "*LEGO Rock Band* combines the multiplayer music experience of *Rock Band* with the fun, customisation and humour of the *LEGO* videogame franchise, packed with brilliant chart-topping songs and classic favourites suitable for younger audiences," according to MTV. Only a few tracks have been announced so far. They are Blur's *Song Two*, Carl Douglas's *Kung Fu Fighting*, Europe's *The Final Countdown*, Good Charlotte's *Boys and Girls* and Pink's *So What*. Say what you want about the song choices, but the whole package starts to make more sense when you realise the target audience. The game is expected to be released for the December holiday period.



## Wow! It's Peggle!

If there's one thing Blizzard hates, it's *World of Warcraft* subscribers who aren't spending every waking hour playing *World of Warcraft*. Testament to this was the inclusion of *Bejeweled* in the game some months ago to give players something to do while they're standing around waiting to, er, play. Apparently, *WoW* players like to roll with the trends, however, and Blizzard's highly unusual partnership with PopCap Games has now grown to include the highly popular *Peggle* as an add-on that won't require any pesky Alt-tabbing during lengthy raids. We've had a chance to play around with it, and while the timing is a little off (possibly due to performance being sapped by the whole other game running in the background), it's certainly *Peggle* in every other way.







## Next CoD: WaW map pack announced

**W**HILE AVID *CALL OF Duty: World at War* fans had to wait a good six months for the release of the creatively-named Map Pack 1, Map Pack 2 is due for release in June, less than two months later. Not that we're complaining, of course. *CoD: WaW* still manages to occupy the majority of our free time with its regular multiplayer modes and the horribly addictive (and now horribly buggy) Nazi Zombies mode. Like the Pack before it, Map Pack 2 will include three new multiplayer maps and a single zombie map. Banzai will see players fighting for control over an exposed river bridge, Corrosion takes place in a destroyed Russian train yard and Sub Pens is a close-quarters map that takes place in a bombed-out submarine base.

Okay, we've restrained ourselves long enough. Here's the skinny on the new zombie map: It's called Shi No Numa, which can be roughly translated from Japanese as Swamp of the Dead (or Zombie Swamp, as Treyarch likes to call it), and takes place in a murky and desolate swamp filled to the brim with progressively quicker zombies. The level will feature traps, flaming Hell Hounds (likely hostile), perk machines and the mysteriously-titled Wunderwaffe DG-2. We know that Wunderwaffe translates to wonder (or super) weapons, and includes the likes of the German StG 44 rifles and flakpanzer tanks, but we're yet to figure out exactly what the DG-2 is. Console players can also look forward to ten new achievements. As before, PC owners should stay tuned for information on a release date. Activision has been tight-lipped about Map Pack 2 releasing on PC at all, but we're sure it'll arrive before too long.

## Pirate Bay founders sentenced to one year in prison

After a nine-day trial, brought about by a Swedish police raid on The Pirate Bay back in 2006, the four founders of one of the biggest file-sharing sites on the Internet have been sentenced to one year in jail. Frederik Neij, Carl Lundstrom, Gottfrid Svartholm Warg (what an awesome name) and Peter Sunde were found guilty of breaking copyright law in a Swedish court. According to Sunde, he already knew the verdict before it was given, saying he received a tip-off from a trusted source. "It used to be only movies, now even verdicts are out before the official release," he joked via Twitter. The trial itself was a 'back and forth' of testimony from Internet and copyright experts, witnesses who claimed damages from their stuff being pirated, and so on and so forth. All four defendants were fined 2.4 million pounds.

## INTERPLAY IN DANGER OF BANKRUPTCY

Interplay Entertainment, founded in 1983, produced quality titles such as *Bard's Tale* and *Wasteland*, not to mention *Battle Chess*, *Fallout*, *Baldur's Gate* and *FreeSpace*. In 2004, they were shut down briefly for the non-payment of workers' salaries. In 2005, they relaunched with a fresh new Website. They also sold the *Fallout* licence to Bethesda for a lot of money. Interplay, in conjunction with Chris Taylor from the original *Fallout* team, is purportedly working on the *Fallout MMO*. If they don't produce by 2011, the rights for the MMO 'fall' to Bethesda. Now, Interplay ended 2008 with a cash balance of zero and a deficit of approximately 2.4 million US dollars, according to a filing for bankruptcy from the publisher. "We continue to seek external sources of funding," Interplay said, "including, but not limited to incurring debt, the selling of assets or securities, licensing of certain product rights in selected territories, selected distribution agreements, and/or other strategic transactions sufficient to provide short-term funding, and achieve our long-term strategic objectives."



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## Catching up with the Ensemble vets

**T**HOSE OF YOU STILL concerned about the employment status of all the good people from now-defunct Ensemble Studios should pay attention. As you may know, a good chunk of them went off to form Robot Entertainment, where they'll continue support and development for *Halo Wars* and support for *Age of Empires III*. Kicking off that development is the Strategic Options add-on pack for *Halo Wars*, which includes three new multiplayer modes: Keepaway, which is essentially CTF; Tug of War, which will see players fighting it out for not only strategic victory, but also the highest number of resources and units left at the end of the day; and Reinforcement, which gives all players endless waves of reinforcements with which to do battle, forcing them to adapt their strategies without the need to worry about funds and resources. There is no scheduled release date for Strategic Options at this time.

Robot Entertainment's Website is finally up and running. While there are no announcements yet on any new games, the site does say that they're working on something, with announcements coming when they're ready.

Also from Ensemble are brothers Paul and David Bettner. Both have experience on *Halo Wars* and *AoE*, and have banded together to form Newtoy, which already has a project in the works for release on the iPhone and iPod touch. Paul, who is the creative director at Newtoy, says, "We share a dream for a new kind of game development. World-class game makers from around the globe – artists and illustrators, designers, musicians, coders – joining forces to craft the highest quality entertainment experiences on the most cutting edge game platforms." Apparently they're "moving away from the monolithic studio model of development," but from the looks of things, they're just getting started.

### EMPIRE INTERACTIVE FILES FOR CHAPTER 11

Empire Interactive, publisher of titles such as *Pipe Mania*, *Force Racing Off Road*, *Hello Kitty: Big City Dreams* and the *FlatOut* series, has officially gone into administration. Forty-nine members of staff were laid off. KPMG Restructuring has been appointed to close up shop and tie up the loose fiscal ends. "Despite the fact that the gaming industry has been relatively unscathed by the current recession, trading losses, development spend and a delay in recent new product approval had a fatal impact on Empire's cash flow," said Ian Cornfield. "We are not looking to sell the business, and are affecting an orderly wind-down of Empire's operations."



## More Heroes coming our way

The heroics continue in Q4 this year with three new games coming out of Activision's insanely popular *Guitar Hero* stable. Branching off from the mainstream will be *DJ Hero*, a title featuring "an all-new innovative turntable controller" for would-be ghetto superstars to feel just like they're spinning the hip-hop, R&B, Motown, electronica and dance tracks guaranteed to put your home theatre system through its paces. Next up is the little-bit-early-in-our-opinion *Guitar Hero 5*. While few details have been confirmed regarding new controllers or updates to existing systems, Activision promises to give players "an unprecedented level of control over the way they play the game with the ability to drop in and out of songs and change band members, instruments and difficulty levels on the fly." Moving on, we find mention of the curious *Band Hero* game. *Band Hero* will give equal focus to all band members and fine-tune the system to be a more family-friendly game to get Gran off the couch and mastering those hammer-ons. More details will definitely be coming your way as soon as they're made available.



## No more heroes (please?)

Wii owners can look forward to yet another watered-down yet undoubtedly suitable gaming experience from EA and Maxis. This time, it's *Spore* getting the treatment with *Spore Hero*. In this title, players will be able to create their ultimate freakshow of evolutionary hiccups and take them on an adventure through multiple worlds while collecting new body parts. It sounds much like the Creature Stage of *Spore*, perhaps concentrated and fixed up a bit. And to be honest, should work absolutely brilliantly on the platform. Not forgetting Nintendo's portable platform, EA will be creating *Spore Hero Arena*, which follows a similar principle, but whereas *Hero* focuses on open adventures with puzzle elements, *Hero Arena* will be an adventure game with tons of gladiatorial combat.

"When Maxis first considered bringing *Spore* to console players, the Nintendo platforms jumped out as a perfect fit. Whether it is the stylus-driven action of the Nintendo DS or playful controllers of the Wii, the massive Nintendo audience is the ideal home for *Spore Hero* and *Spore Hero Arena*," says Lucy Bradshaw, VP and General Manager at Maxis.



## They said it...

"...the name is surely out there now, and the awards really helped. If you look back at the history of videogames, a lot of times **it's been the second game that's benefited** from the first game's critical success."

Glen Schofield, VP of Visceral Games (EA Redwood Shores) on *Dead Space*

"When you've taken an idea, nurtured its embryonic form, built it lovingly from scratch into your full-fledged all-singing, all-dancing next IP, **it can be almost impossible to see it from the naïve perspective** of the first-time player."

Byron Atkinson-Jones, Producer at Introversion

"Sometimes [App Store comments are] helpful. Sometimes [they're] just really abusive. **It's depressing to see a high-quality game like Tumble get a comment of 'Meh, balancing blocks is stupid'.** And it drops from an average of five stars to four and a half instantly."

Neil Young, ngmoco

"To me, *Battlefield: Bad Company* was an eye-opener, and for a very long time I think the PC audience was seen as the hardcore, the most competitive and dedicated audience. **Maybe at one time that was partially true**, but now we definitely see a fanatic shooter audience on console."

Lars Gustavsson, creative director at DICE



## Meet the JigSAW

It's not every day that horror films make their way onto the small screen, but that's exactly what Konami and developer Zombie Studios are attempting with *SAW*. The game will take place in an abandoned asylum where the film's protagonist, Jigsaw, has laid down all manner of creepy and terrifying traps for you to figure out as detective David Tapp. It's not just your own blood on your hands, as the player will be responsible for saving the lives of innocent (or, as the film goes, not so innocent) victims, even having to choose between them as the clock ticks away. Expect all manner of cunning traps, moral dilemmas and ruthless goons following in Jigsaw's footsteps. "Now Jigsaw has the upper hand and has captured the detective. Tapp must play a deadly game – the likes of which he has been investigating for years – to escape, and in order to do so he must survive the lethal traps and puzzles that Jigsaw has put in place for him and others. But each victim has a dark connection to Tapp. Will Tapp save them? Can he survive his obsession to find the Jigsaw killer?"



## Sacred 2 developer goes bankrupt

*Sacred 2*, the action role-playing game (like *Diablo 2* but with more Eastern-styled breasts), has been plagued by delays. However, after four years of development the game is ready for release. Except, its developer, Ascaron Entertainment, has confirmed that the company has filed for bankruptcy. "After four years developing *Sacred 2: Fallen Angel*, an extended development delay made it necessary for Ascaron to go into administration," the developer said in a statement. "Even with the high personal commitment of all Ascaron employees, it was not possible to make up for this delay." However, this is not expected to affect the game's release, and Ascaron has met with "several well-known interested parties to discuss a possible takeover."

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# Paramount starts gaming

**WHILE THE FILM INDUSTRY** may be slowly growing, it's got nothing on the booming videogame industry - a fact Paramount has finally woken up to. They're not even stopping to negotiate boxed-copy distribution, either. Instead, the studio has opted to jump straight into digital distribution where their titles will live for the foreseeable future. So, what's on the menu from Paramount Digital Entertainment this year? They'll be kicking off with a movie tie-in *Star Trek* game called *Star Trek D-A-C*, followed by a few more soon after, namely *Top Gun*, *The Warriors* and *Days of Thunder*. While it's all well and good that we have a new studio and publisher to look forward to, let's not forget Warner's dead boring *Watchmen* beat-'em-up - something Paramount will

do well to learn from.

*Star Trek D-A-C* will be a multiplayer-focused top-down 3D space shooter featuring the Federation doing battle with the Romulans. It's been designed to be accessible for the casual market, while still offering the strategic depth that more hard-core players (read: rabid Trekkies) will appreciate. Players will do battle in enclosed stages where they'll compete for strategic objectives, depending on which of the three game modes is chosen. Three unique ship classes are available - the starship (including the U.S.S. Enterprise from the new film), the bomber and the fighter - and the game will allow for solo, online versus or online co-op gameplay. *Star Trek D-A-C* should be available on XBLA by time you read this.

## TRIVIAL PURSUITS

If you consider yourself knowledgeable on all things gaming and care to share that knowledge with a mile-long queue of newbies in desperate need of an education, head over to [www.gameanswers.com](http://www.gameanswers.com) and sign up. Developed by videogame rental company Game Fly, Game Answers is a Yahoo! Answers-inspired Q&A Website for gamers, featuring straightforward technical questions like changing profile names in *Need for Speed* to more forum-style questions like "What games do you think have the highest replay value?" It's a bit of a mixed bag at the moment, but the ratings and rankings system keeps the most knowledgeable gamers shining among the spammers; and the topics are, for the most part, at least interesting to read.

## It's story time, kids

Videogame players who enjoy reading about their latest gaming obsession in book form (you know - bound, smallish pages numbering in the hundreds, loads of text, not too many pictures) will be pleased to know that Bethesda Softworks, publisher of the first-person RPG series *The Elder Scrolls*, will soon be releasing the first book based on the *Elder Scrolls* universe. They'll be teaming up with best-selling author Greg Keyes, who's responsible for the *Age of Unreason* books and a handful of *Star Wars* novels from the *New Jedi Order* series, to publish the first of the series, entitled *The Infernal City*, in Q4 this year. *The Infernal City* takes place after the events in *Oblivion*. According to Bethesda, the citizens of Tamriel are once again facing an uncertain future. "Floating high above the land is a strange and mysterious city that is casting a horrifying shadow - wherever it falls, people die and rise again as undead. It is up to an unlikely duo - a seventeen-year-old girl named Annaig and the Emperor's young son, Prince Attrebus - to rescue the kingdom from doom."

## 8,450 Game Industry staff laid off since July '08

According to market analyst Wanda Meloni, over eight thousand game industry workers have lost their jobs since July last year. Meloni has calculated that 75% of the layoffs - around 6,000 people - were in North America alone. That represents 12% of that region's total workforce, the rest being spread across Asia and the UK. With reference to the closure of developers including Microsoft's Aces Studio (*Flight Simulator*) and Ensemble Studios (*Halo Wars*), Meloni notes that "a handful of others are on life support, operating with a skeletal workforce and actively looking for buyers." It's not all doom and gloom, though. "The real story here is there are 6,300 industry professionals in North America alone looking for something new. Many people are looking at the current market dynamics and starting their own small development studios. With this desire to branch out on their own, they are part of what I am calling the Gaming Renaissance Movement. What these new studios lack in financing and slick marketing, they are making up for in creativity, vision and sheer grit. Many of these start-ups are self-funded by groups combining their severance packages. However, once they get going, these talented individuals will make up a next wave of independent studios and will be the future of renaissance gaming."







## Evolution of MATT HAZARD



1983 – The Adventures of Matt in Hazard Land



1987 – A Fistfull of Hazard [sic]



1990 – Conflict of the Deities



1992 – Matt Hazard 3D



1995 – You Only Live 1,317 Times



2009 – Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard

## Bethesda falls out; Obsidian in

Those of you concerned that *Fallout 3* will never return to its original Black Isle flavour can finally put down the razor blades – we have some good news for you. No, Black Isle isn't reforming. Instead, the development studio that was born of Black Isle's death, Obsidian Entertainment, has scooped up the rights to develop the next of the 'new' *Fallouts* – *Fallout: New Vegas*. That's right, there's no number involved, meaning this is not a sequel. According to Bethesda (who still owns the publishing rights, and will publish this next title), "It is not a sequel to *Fallout 3*. It's simply another *Fallout* game in that universe." The release date has been pegged at a very loose "next year", and Bethesda's Peter Hines has been careful to mention it will be like *Fallout 3*, so don't break out the champagne in joyous celebration of isometric 'turn-based' just yet. We're putting our trust in Obsidian that they'll be able to manage a careful mix of the old with the new in whatever way they see fit.



## Three million US children are "pathological gamers"

Researcher and psychologist Douglas Gentile of Iowa State University has discovered that 8.5% (that's a real number!) of Americans between the ages of eight and eighteen who play games show multiple "signs" of addiction to the pastime. Addiction to an addictive activity that's totally fun and entertaining and far better than homework? Shock! What will science reveal next? For the study, Gentile questioned over a thousand youths about games, using various criteria usually used to assess pathological gambling, and noticed that these little gamers reported at least six of the eleven symptoms. Symptoms include stealing games or money to buy games, irritability when gaming time was reduced and lying about the length of playing time. "I thought this was parental histrionics – that kids are playing a lot and parents don't understand the motivation, so they label it an addiction," Gentile said. "It turns out that I was wrong." Of course, the study doesn't include looking into bad parenting. "For some kids, they play in such a way that it becomes out of balance. And they're damaging other areas of their lives; and it isn't just one area, it's many areas," he added.



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## IO KEEPING BUSY

Eidos president Ian Livingstone recently confirmed that IO Interactive is officially working on the next *Hitman* title as well as a new *Kane & Lynch*. Few details other than a 'non-committal' release date for K&L have been announced. "There's a target date for September, but as you understand, these games often slip because the production times are so difficult to predict due to the amount of work they have to put into them now in high-end consoles. It's a tough business."

## RESIDENT IPHONE

Capcom's popular action/horror/adventure is muscling its way onto the iPhone. Entitled *Resident Evil: Degeneration*, the game will feature gameplay mechanics similar to those found in *Resident Evil 4* and *5*, albeit slimmed down to fit on the mobile platform. The game is based on the 'fully-CG' film of the same name.

# Fall of the White Wolf

**WITCHER FANS HOPING TO** get their hands on the console conversion, *Rise of the White Wolf*, will be sorely disappointed – the game has been put on indefinite hold. Citing financial woes as the main cause, publisher Widescreen Games and developer Cd Projekt told sources that the companies were working on three titles based on the series: *White Wolf*, *The Witcher 2* and an entirely new product. When the financial crisis started to force a few belts to be tightened, the companies laid off a significant number of employees and cancelled the unannounced project. With matters still worsening, they've now been forced to implement further staff cuts and drop *Rise of the White Wolf* as well, despite claims that the title was close to completion. All that's left of the series is *The Witcher 2*. "The development of the game *The Witcher: Rise of the White Wolf* has been suspended pending the resolution of financial issues between the different project partners. We regret this particular provision in respect of the fans who were waiting with impatience [for] the title. I hope we find a solution in agreement with our recent and historical partners involved in this ambitious project," according to Olivier Masclef, Widescreen Games director.



## THIEF 4 OFFICIAL

Development on *Thief 4* (or *Thi4f*, if the new logo is anything to go by) is officially underway, according to developer Eidos-Montreal. The studio, which is also currently working on *Dues Ex 3*, confirmed that they're "in the early development stages for *Thief 4*, but this is an incredibly ambitious and exciting project for Eidos." General Manager Stéphane D'Astous didn't have much more to say about the project: "While it's too early for us to offer any specific game details, right now we are focused on recruiting the very best talent to join the core team at the studio and help us make what we believe will be one of the most exciting games on the market."



## Jerry Bruckheimer Games Inc.

Jerry Bruckheimer, the producer behind dozens of projects, from *CSI* to *Pirates of the Caribbean* to the upcoming *Prince of Persia* film, is preparing to enter the game development industry and it looks like he's diving in head first. Bruckheimer has teamed up with publisher MTV Games to form Jerry Bruckheimer Games Inc., based in Santa Monica, California. "Games are evolving just like movies," Bruckheimer says. "There's storytelling and there's character development in games. We're in the entertainment business. We entertain you in theatres, on TV and on your game platforms."

To get things started, the company has enlisted the aid of two industry veterans. *Halo 3* producer Jim Veevaert will be president in charge of productions and Ubisoft's Jay Cohen will be president of development. "We're tag teaming this, we're using our combined 25 years-plus experience in production and publishing in the industry to really get close to the metal and develop new products, to really be focused on working with the top tier talent," said Cohen. According to Veevaert, "We're going big. We want to focus on a few really big projects to make sure that we have the impact." The studio will be working with a number of independent developers to co-develop new IP, and will dedicate itself to working with as few limits as possible.



## It's the sound of the police

Done with your latest *Burnout Paradise* DLC yet? Didn't think so. Criterion is releasing so many DLC packs for the popular crash-racer lately that we're almost surprised they're still in business (at least they're charging for them now). For those of you who always felt that *Burnout Paradise*'s idyllic locations were missing the authoritative charm that a pack of squad cars bring, the Cops and Robbers downloadable pack should be the answer to your prayers. No details are available yet but we can assume it'll have the regular arrangement of *NFS*-inspired chase modes and challenges.



# Gaming Charts

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LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...



March 2009 figures provided by GfK  
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## PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 inFAMOUS
- 2 Red Faction: Guerrilla
- 3 PROTOTYPE
- 4 Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots – Platinum
- 5 Killzone 2

## XBOX 360

- 1 Gears of War 2
- 2 Halo Wars
- 3 Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince
- 4 Guitar Hero: Greatest Hits
- 5 Fight Night Round 4

## PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Monsters vs. Aliens
- 2 X-Men Origins: Wolverine
- 3 Guitar Hero: Metallica
- 4 Secret Agent Clank
- 5 Guitar Hero: Metallica – Bundle

## PC

- 1 The Sims 3
- 2 Wolfenstein
- 3 Company of Heroes: Tales of Valor
- 4 Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II
- 5 Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.

## PSP

- 1 Buzz!: Brain of the World
- 2 Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings
- 3 Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen
- 4 Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.
- 5 Ben 10: Alien Force

## WII

- 1 EA Sports Active: Personal Trainer
- 2 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10
- 3 Sports Island 2
- 4 Big Family Games
- 5 Boom Blox: Bash Party

## DS

- 1 Professor Kageyama's Maths Training
- 2 Sight Training
- 3 Coraline
- 4 Monsters vs. Aliens
- 5 Ben 10: Alien Force

## PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Resident Evil 5
- 2 FIFA 09
- 3 Killzone 2
- 4 WALL-E
- 5 Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe

## XBOX 360

- 1 Resident Evil 5
- 2 Gears of War 2
- 3 Kung Fu Panda
- 4 FIFA 09
- 5 Fable II

## PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 2 FIFA 09
- 3 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 4 Need for Speed: Most Wanted
- 5 Cricket 2007

## PC

- 1 Need for Speed: Carbon – Collector's Edition
- 2 FIFA 09
- 3 F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin
- 4 Need for Speed: Most Wanted
- 5 Cricket 2007

## PSP

- 1 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 2 Buzz!: Brain Bender
- 3 Burnout Legends
- 4 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 5 FIFA 07

## WII

- 1 Wii Fit + Balance Board
- 2 Mario Kart + Wheel
- 3 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 4 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09
- 5 My Fitness Coach

## DS

- 1 Dr. Kawashima's Brain Training
- 2 New Super Mario Bros.
- 3 Mario Kart
- 4 Dr. Kawashima's Brain Training
- 5 Pokémon Diamond



PROTOTYPE



## Howzat!

If you fancy some all-out balls-and-bats action, you'll be pleased to know that Codemasters (who also publishes the acclaimed *Brian Lara* series of cricket games) has announced that they will be publishing *Ashes Cricket 2009*. "The Ashes is set to be the sporting event of the summer and it's great to be producing the official game of the series," said Jamie Firth, producer at Codemasters. "In partnering with the development team at Transmission Games, *Ashes Cricket 2009* is a cricket title with an unprecedented heritage that comes from two companies that know and love the sport. The *Brian Lara* titles became the number one cricket gaming brand for over ten years and it's a reputation that we fully intend to continue with *Ashes Cricket 2009*." The game promises an "Ashes" mode, which will feature all five Test Matches from the Ashes series played out at recreations of world-renowned stadiums. In addition, 20-over games, regular Test Matches and One Day Internationals will all be available for you to test your bowling, batting and fielding prowess. Local and online multiplayer is on the cards. The game is set for release on Xbox 360, PS3 and PC, with a Wii version coming later in the year.



## WESTERN INFLUENCE

It turns out that a little Western influence might have been exactly what Square-Enix needed to break away from RPGs filled spiky-haired teenagers. Sadly, they're stepping out of one saturated market into another with their first-ever fully Western-developed title, *Order of War*. Set in WW2, players will command various troops, vehicles and aircraft across two campaigns: USA versus Germany on the Western front, and Germany versus Russia on the East. Huge promises of "cinematic intensity, hugely realistic battles and historical accuracy" pour out of Square-Enix Ltd's John Yamamoto, but we're not holding our breaths just yet.





## BioShock 2 multiplayer

*Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament* co-creators Digital Extremes will be teaming up with 2K Games to bring multiplayer gameplay to *BioShock 2*. "The fans asked for a multiplayer experience and we answered," said Christoph Hartmann, president of 2K. "With Digital Extremes delivering a multiplayer experience for *BioShock 2* that features all of the things that make *BioShock* unique, we're holding ourselves to a high standard so that we can deliver the depth and variety that fans of the *BioShock* universe demand." Players will take on the role of plasmid

test subjects for Sinclair Solutions and will be able to experience Rapture before the events of the first *BioShock* in both redesigned and all-new arenas, including Kashmir Restaurant and Mercury Suites. Players will earn experience points to access new weapons, plasmids and tonics to create custom classes perfect for their playing style. Sadly there is no confirmation on the actual game modes available, but Digital Extremes knows what they're doing with multiplayer gameplay. We can be sure to receive an excellent package when the game hits shelves in September/October.



## Red Dead Redemption will be "slightly unpleasant"

Rockstar's upcoming Western shooter, *Red Dead Redemption*, has been described by co-founder Dan Houser as having "blood and gore and gruesomeness" as key elements of the game. "It's not generally something where we didn't think it was being gratuitous at all. We thought it was vital for it to properly depict these kinds of characters and [in] this kind of world, the violence has to feel slightly raw and unpleasant."

He then went on to describe the

inclusion of racial tensions, albeit scaled down somewhat to avoid any outright offensiveness that could land the game a banning in some countries. "Tensions we did want to include - within our research - the language. Not that we shy away from too much, and we didn't really shy away from it - people use to describe other races as insanely offensive to modern ears, and we hint at that but we maybe don't do it with quite the vibrancy that people use in some of our research [sic]."

## NAUGHTY DOG FOUNDERS FORM NEW STUDIO

Co-founders of Naughty Dog Studios, Jason Rubin and Andrew Gavin, have returned to the industry to form the new casual-focused game studio, Monkey Gods. The company already has two projects underway - a word game "with a twist" entitled *MonkWerks*, and an iPhone and Facebook conversion of the puzzle game *Snood*. Sure, it's hardly in the league of *Crash Bandicoot* or *Jak and Daxter*, which the two produced during their long years at Naughty Dog, but it certainly serves as an indication of the popularity and ease of production that casual gaming offers.

The two are joined by Jason Kay as COO. Kay's the business muscle with experience in building sustainable media strategies. He co-founded the MySpace-focused company Flektor with Rubin and Gavin. "So we have game experience, Web experience, social networking experience, and a love of all of them," says Gavin. "Monkey Gods was started so we could work on our passions. We think you will see that in the games."



## THE BAGINATOR

So we all know the history of the poor badger, stomped by a demon and then resurrected, lost to the Internet torrents, only to return as the Dread Pirate Badger. All of this left him with a peg leg, an eyepatch and a healthy respect for demons.

And so his story continues...

On the weekends, the badger likes to run free in the long savannah grass near the highway by the airport. Often he dashes across the road [you know... to get to the other side]. The peg leg and eyepatch have robbed him of his usual nimbleness. Too bad he didn't spot that truck carrying cybernetic body parts, which was luckily followed by an ambulance full of cybernetic doctors and scientists, which was luckily followed by a military jeep on its way to Vicinity 42 in Kempton Park (they do advanced experiments here in an underground lab). They worked for days on the battered remains of our poor badger and finally produced what you see on this page. He's still hiding (they wanted to use him for nefarious purposes) in the magazine - go get him. Remember, it's not going to be easy anymore - he's more advanced.

Send your sightings to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject line 'June Badger' and stand a chance to win a *Ghost Rider: Trail of Tears* graphic novel.

## LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Margaret Tresidder, p50



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## Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a copy of *Red Faction: Guerrilla* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Games. Send your captions to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject line [June Caption].



### THIS MONTH'S CONTEST



**NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR:**  
"I'm funny how? I mean funny like I'm a clown? I amuse you?"

### LAST MONTH'S WINNER



"Damn, I've got to deflate this thing before the wife gets home."  
– **Nikki Edwards**

## New City of Heroes expansion on its way

The four-year-old superhero (and super villain) MMO will be receiving its first major expansion since 'sister game' *City of Villains* launched in 2005. To open up the game to long-standing players, this news expansion, entitled *Going Rogue*, will offer players the opportunity to turn to the other side, effectively switching from hero to villain or vice versa. To 'mark' this important event, players will have access to the new area of Praetoria, which is a mirror image of the world ruled by Tyrant.

Two new characters, Maelstrom (a hero turned bad) and Desdemona (the opposite), form the centre piece around which the new trailer is based. Paragon Studios has been confirmed as developer, although no release date other than "soon" has been announced.

## Events

### MAGIC THE GATHERING

#### NOVVA'S FRIDAY NIGHT MAGIC

**When:** Every Friday  
**Time:** 19:00

**Type:** Standard, Deck Constructed  
**Cost:** R30

[novvagaming.co.za](http://novvagaming.co.za)

#### MID-MONTH MADNESS 2-HEADED GIANT

**When:** 13 June

**Time:** 13:00

**Type:** Standard, Deck Constructed, Team

**Cost:** R30 per player  
[novvagaming.co.za](http://novvagaming.co.za)

#### EXTENDED

**When:** 6 June

**Time:** 13:00

**Type:** Extended, Deck Constructed  
**Cost:** R30 per player

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#### STANDARD

**When:** 20, 27 June

**Time:** 13:00

**Type:** Standard, Deck Constructed  
**Cost:** R30 per player

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### LANs

#### OLD-SCHOOL LAN

**When:** 27 June

**Where:** Novva Gaming, JHB

**Type:** Competition  
[novvagaming.co.za](http://novvagaming.co.za)

#### MAYHEM CASUAL GAMER CUP QUALIFIER

**When:** 13 June

**Where:** Northgate, JHB

**Type:** Competition  
[mayhem.co.za](http://mayhem.co.za)

#### MAYHEM CASUAL GAMER CUP QUALIFIER

**When:** 20 June

**Where:** Boksburg

**Type:** Competition  
**Cost:** R50

[mayhem.co.za](http://mayhem.co.za)



## Release List

Release dates subject to change

### WEEK 1 – 5 JUNE

TITLE	PLATFORMS
The Sims 3	PC
The Sims 3 – Collector's Edition	PC
Boom Blox Bash Party	Wii

### WEEK 2 – 12 JUNE

TITLE	PLATFORMS
Coraline	PS2, Wii, DS
inFAMOUS	PS3
Secret Agent Clank	PS2
SingStar Vol. 4	PS3
History Great Empires: Rome	DS
Wipeout Pulse	PS2
Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings	PS2, PSP, Wii, DS
Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood	PC, 360, PS3
PROTOTYPE	PC, 360, PS3

### WEEK 3 – 19 JUNE

TITLE	PLATFORMS
Dance Dance Revolution: Hottest Party 2	Wii
Red Faction: Guerrilla	PC, 360, PS3
Guitar Hero: Metallica + Guitar	PS3, 360, PS2, Wii
Summer Sports 2: Island Sports Party	Wii
EA Sports Grand Slam Tennis	Wii

### WEEK 4 – 26 JUNE

TITLE	PLATFORMS
Tales of Vesperia	360
Guitar Hero: Greatest Hits (Standalone)	PS3, 360, PS2, Wii
Anno 1404	PC
Anno: Create a New World	Wii, NDS
Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	PC, 360, PS3, Wii, DS
Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen	Multi
Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen (Autobot)	DS
Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen (Decepticon)	DS
Guitar Hero: World Tour	PC
Spore: Galactic Adventures	PC
Overlord II	PC, 360, PS3
Race Driver: GRID (Platinum/ Classic)	360, PS3
SBK: Superbike World Championship 09	Multi

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# MIKTAR'S INTERDEPENDINGS

BY MIKTAR DRACON

## Ten Tips to become a Better Gamer

**IT WOULD BE PRESUMPTUOUS** to try to explain what a "gamer" is. Or even what I mean by "a better gamer" than what you already are. So I won't. Instead, I suggest that you read on and decide for yourselves what it is I'm trying to say.

### 1. Forget about e-sports and cyber athleticism

The trendy fad of cyber athleticism doesn't want to encourage more gamers. It wants everyone to be the viewers for the benefit of the event organisers who are paid by sponsors. Cyber athletes by nature don't play games. They practise one game intensely to be the best at it. Tournaments, competitions and such aren't an issue. The phallus-waving "Olympic Sport" pundits and their toxic attitudes are. This may go over your head, but try to talk to a skateboarder sometime.

### 2. Explore Outside Your Comfort Genres

Everyone has the genres they prefer. Often this leads to premature boredom with that genre or even gaming in general unless you explore. There is only so much movement, evolution or enticement at any given time in a specific genre. Try something different for a change. You might actually like *The Sims* if you can put your machismo aside. You don't have to keep playing something you don't like. Try to actually play it first before deciding you don't like it, though.

### 3. Practise Platform Agnosticism

Don't be a platform fanboy. Nobody cares that you think your gaming system of choice is better than theirs. Become a game fanboy. Not a fanboy of one specific game, but rather of games in general. Even the ones you don't personally like. If you still hold fast to an antiquated belief that a keyboard and mouse are superior to a dual-analogue gamepad when it comes to first-person shooters\*, then you're still trapped in a mental cage created by your own ignorance. Free your mind, Neo.

### 4. Examine the East

Unless you're naturally drawn towards more exotic gaming pleasures, gamers tend to be Western-centric in their entertainment. This not only limits the scope of games available, but also the berth of creative or exciting ideas you could be experiencing. Culture has a huge impact on thinking, and 'thought-space' is where games are born. Experience alternative thought by giving games from outside your own culture more than a cursory glance. The strange, spicy, and utterly exotic await you if you're willing to experiment.

### 5. Have an Interest In Indie

Social Darwinism is the fallacy that the "good" survives and the majority will adopt it because of its survival. The reality in society, however, is that Social Darwinism bows to money – because money equals power. Money gives people the power to sway what society thinks. Because of that, it means that money has the ability to convince people that something has risen to the top because it is the best, when this is a lie. Much is happening in the indie gaming scene that may blow your gaming mind. There is Happiness in Pursuit.

### 6. Develop Good Multiplayer Habits

Help the noobs. There is no skill or pride in just wailing on the noobs. But tell a noob how to get better, and you have another person worth playing against. Don't get mad, get even. If someone beats you in a game, don't whine and start throwing out the insults and accusations. If they're really as lame as you accuse them of being, you can beat them. Try again. Praise the good kills, even if they're not yours – especially if they're not yours. Don't be a jackass. You may think that having an assertive veneer of self-confidence is what you need to get ahead, but you're only fooling yourself.

### 7. Don't Be an Angry Tool

When you let yourself get angry at the controller because you have died, because of "how unfair the game is," because of "how stupid the developers are for making such a bad game," etc., you're just creating and reinforcing the habit of getting angry fast. Don't expect to be awesome at a game two minutes in. Don't scream at your TV or throw your controller. What you feed grows. What you starve withers. Or so the saying goes. Don't feed your anger. If you find yourself getting angry at a game, stand up and walk around the block.

### 8. Beware the Siren Call of Internet Chat

Don't be one of those people. You know the ones who mostly talk about gaming on the Internet but never actually play games. If you do play games, don't go online to talk about how bad Game X is, or how Game Y is for idiots. Instead, share stories about things that happened in the games you've played, or the real-life events tied to them. You reap what you sow – sow some good gaming vibes.

### 9. Be A Man, Use An FAQ

Games are supposed to be fun. Half of the games you never finish are the ones that frustrated you. Don't let that happen to you: relax, take it easy, and look at an FAQ or ask for help when you're in trouble.

### 10. Cheaters Never Have Fun (For Long)

Even if you know there is an exploit, even if you can use a cheat, don't. Not only are you hurting your chances of enjoying the game the way it was designed, you're also infecting your mind with bad memetic programming. Cheaters never prosper because they don't come to understand the exact nature of the exchange that happens when they cheat. **NAG**

"Culture has a huge impact on thinking, and 'thought-space' is where games are born. Experience alternative thought by giving games from outside your own culture more than a cursory glance."

\* Well, they are, aren't they? Ed





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PLAYSTATION 3



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XBOX LIVE



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# RAMBLAT

BY WALT PRETORIUS

## We want LIVE, and we want it now!

**THERE ARE MANY THINGS** to like about South Africa, and as I have said before, I am positive and upbeat about this country. I saw a bumper sticker recently that read, "South Africa: Take it or Leave." My sentiments could not have been expressed more succinctly. We don't need negativity in this country. Negative folks, who constantly complain and moan and wail about this country, should really just go somewhere else. We don't need them.

What we do need, though, is a little faith from the rest of the world. I don't mean politically. I mean in the fact that we are not as Third World as everyone assumes. A good friend recently came back to South Africa after a long absence, and was surprised at how 'modern' everything is here. Well, yes. We are not all living in grass huts. We don't communicate via the bush telegraph. We are actually pretty advanced here on the southern tip of Africa.

We are not, for example, India. Our percentage of affluent people here is much higher, our infrastructure is better, and our service delivery (believe it or not) is a good sight better. However, there is a stigma attached to our beautiful country. The rest of the world sees the word "Africa" in South Africa, and immediately assumes that we ride rhinos and work at a Sorghum beer brewery. And that makes being a gamer in this country incredibly frustrating.

Take, for example, *The Godfather II* – a fun game, really. But the fact that certain advancements in the title can only be made by playing online is damn annoying, because we don't have the facilities to play online. At least, we don't have the one facility that we should have: Xbox LIVE.

I am thinking of writing a letter to Microsoft. Not the South African office – they kind of 'get' the way that this country works. They're South African, after all. No, rather, this will be a letter to whoever decided that we shouldn't have Xbox LIVE services locally.

South Africa may not be the biggest fish in the video gaming pond, but we're still in the pond. Surely they can see this. And the great lengths that South Africans go to in order to set up illicit Xbox LIVE accounts should indicate two more things: firstly, we want the service; and secondly (applying various laws related to supply and demand and consumer apathy), the already fair number of people using LIVE will grow if it is available locally, based on the fact that it will be far less effort to get things rolling. Surely they must see this?

I think I will write that letter. Yes. I will. I don't know if anyone will pay attention – they probably won't – but at least I will feel like I have done my part for the good of local gamers. Heaven knows. I have to do something good at least once in my life.. **NAG**

I am thinking of writing a letter to Microsoft. Not the South African office – they kind of 'get' the way that this country works. They're South African, after all. **No, rather, this will be a letter to whoever decided that we shouldn't have Xbox LIVE services locally.**



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Look & Listen  
For the Fans





## Games Industry, you capricious sell-out

**CAPITALISM HAS SINGLE-HANDEDLY MADE** the gaming industry what it is today. Games make people a lot of money and will continue to do so as long as there is a demand for them (it's the 'supply and demand' thing). Consequently, for us as gamers, capitalism is a good thing, because the more money developers and publishers make, the more games are made. We are, however, inherently greedy, so how do we increase the amount of games we get to play? We could start by increasing the consumer market by creating more gamers. It would be like a zombie outbreak: the more brains we eat, the more gamers we'd create... or something like that. Sadly, our zombie outbreak would not be without its Jill Valentine or Chris Redfield.

Every now and then capitalism lets serious gamers down. For every outstanding game that is made, there are at least five rubbish ones that see the light of day. It amazes me how many people are stupid enough to buy those rubbish games. This got me thinking: who on Earth **are** those people? Who are the morons who buy, for example, the movie-to-game franchise bastardisations? Surely, it isn't you who is reading this? **Most** readers of *NAG* know a good game from a blatant cash-in. This leaves two misguided groups: people new to the gaming fold and parents of gamers.

The former I feel sorry for and at the same time embarrassed in front of. Picture it: they are tentatively taking their first steps into the gaming world. They are the proud, new owners of a console or gaming PC. They excitedly purchase their first game, which happens to be a game of that awesome action film they just saw - hooray! They rush home to play only to be subjected to the most obscene excrement the industry is able to disgorge. Our new gamer will think something along the lines of: "What the hell is this? This game sucks! Gaming sucks! Gamers suck! This isn't fun at all! Why the hell did I get into this stupid scene? I'm going outside to play cricket instead." Just like that, we lose a sustainable source of revenue for our beloved industry, and the profit-hungry publishers turn a quick buck off a blatant, franchise cash-in.

Parents, the second lot in our misguided group, can be broadened to extended family and loved ones. Most have **no** clue about the gaming scene, but know that "little Timmy has a Play-box, or whatever it's called." This group means well, but inevitably winds up choosing a game for little Timmy that is tied up with what they perceive as pop culture at the time. Unfortunately, pop culture tie-ins with the gaming industry

don't always make for great games (*Iron Man*, *Transformers*, *Lost*, and – most famously – *ET* for the Atari 2600). The result is that you have ill-informed people buying dreadful games for some poor gamer. Once again, the consumer loses and poor Timmy is forced to go outside and play cricket rather than subject himself to another second of *Beowulf: The Game*.

On that note: Timmy, please would you go and call your parents so that they can read this article. Go on, we'll wait for you...

You're back. Good. Hello Timmy's parents, and welcome to *NAG* magazine. It's about time you started paying attention to your child's interests, so I recommend that you pick up his copy of *NAG* and familiarise yourselves with what constitutes a good game. Not only will this allow you to make informed purchasing decisions, but you'll also make Timmy happy and earn yourselves valuable 'street credibility' at the same time. *NAG* is quite nifty: each game that's reviewed has a numerical score. Anything that scores above 70 is a good game, so buy those ones for Timmy. Thanks, it was nice meeting you.

It seems, therefore, that capitalism is a double-edged sword for gamers. While it has driven the industry to produce some amazing titles, it has also produced inane drivel. Circumventing said inane drivel will surely result in an expanded and discerning market, which means more **quality** games for us. The next time you're browsing the games section of a shop and you see a misguided soul reaching for some hideous, quick-buck title, wrench it from their grasp and steer them in the right direction. If they won't listen to your reasoning, then tell them to start reading *NAG*. **NAG**

Every now and then capitalism lets serious gamers down. **For every outstanding game that is made, there are at least five rubbish ones that see the light of day.**



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CLIMAX



codemasters™



# MODERN WARFARE®

Developer→ Infinity Ward Publisher→ Activision | Blizzard Distributor→ Megarom Release Date→ 10 November 2009

"Cujo Two-One this is Vulture, solid copy on all."

**T**HERE ARE VERY FEW people on Earth who have seen what we're about to see, and we're going to share every moment of it with you.

Robert Bowling has been Infinity Ward's Community Manager for three years now and he's jittery with a kind of nervous energy. He beams a giant smile and laughs like a proud father as he leads us on a guided tour of the game developer's inner workings, including a room filled to the ceiling with nothing but empty cardboard boxes. No area is off limits as he narrates in detail who does what where. We're almost surprised we weren't shown the individual stalls in the bathroom. Into the viewing room we go. Waiting for us there is Vince Zampella, the Studio Head, sporting a backwards baseball cap and infectious happy-go-lucky attitude. Vince doesn't say much, content to let his mischievous smile do all the talking. Rob fires up an Xbox 360 and asks if we'd finished the previous game (by which he means *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*). Of course we had. Rob approves, and then hits a button on his gamepad to launch our exclusive 'first look' into *Modern Warfare 2*.

## >> CLIFFHANGER

Captain John "Soap" MacTavish is squatting on the edge of an icy precipice overlooking a massive snow-covered vista of mountains. With a grunt, he indicates he's ready to move on. His beard is partially frozen, his face twice as detailed as when you saw him last in *Modern Warfare*. If you thought *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* looked realistic, you're in for a surprise. Checking the cliff wall behind him, MacTavish says the ice is good, and then starts to climb up the cliff using ice picks. Rob follows him up, hitting the left and right triggers to climb using ice picks. Right before reaching the top, a Russian fighter plane zips past, causing snow and ice to rain down on them both. After reaching the top and climbing back on to solid ground, MacTavish indicates a ledge obscured by fog off to the side. He runs and jumps, a thud indicating he made it through and over. Rob follows, jumping into the fog. It wasn't far enough so he slams into the ice, slipping down, stopped only by hooking his ice picks into the ice. Rob climbs up towards MacTavish. The ice picks lose grip. MacTavish reaches out and grabs Rob's hand, pulling him up to safety.

The two proceed down a snow-covered mountain path before spotting two guards walking away from them. MacTavish whispers "On three" and counts down

under his breath. On the count of one, Rob fires his suppressed rifle at the guard on the left, while MacTavish takes out the one on the right. The instant they fire, a fighter jet swoops down to land on a runway to the left, hidden in the fog. Rob and MacTavish proceed to take out a few more patrols before reaching their destination: a Russian military base in the mountains. MacTavish tells Rob to use his heartbeat sensor, which flips open on his gun. White dots indicate guard patrols. As Rob enters the base, a heavy snowstorm hits, making him practically invisible. With support from MacTavish, shooting unsuspecting guards in his way, and by using the heartbeat sensor, Rob navigates the huge base until he comes across fuel tankers by a runway. Planting explosives on the tankers for a "Plan B" - as MacTavish calls it - Rob proceeds into a nearby hanger.

Heading upstairs into an office room, Rob finds the computer he was looking for and searches for the intelligence he and MacTavish were sent to find. Over the radio, MacTavish informs Rob that he's been compromised. He tells Rob to stay hidden and prepare for "Plan B." Rob inches out of the office to see MacTavish held at gunpoint by Russian soldiers on the runway. The enemy shouts that they will fire on MacTavish unless he surrenders. They start counting down. As they reach one, Rob hits the trigger on his explosives, unleashing hell. The firefight is intense as Rob and MacTavish run from the base, sliding down an ice-covered hill before being set upon by soldiers on snowmobiles. Some accurate shots take the riders out, leaving behind a couple of useful getaway vehicles. Making their escape away from the base gives us time to take in the huge, detailed snow-capped mountains in the distance. Enemies ramp in from all sides as Rob and MacTavish speed and swerve down the mountain on snowmobiles. The chase sequence ends in a high-speed, tree-dodging, gunfire-from-moving-vehicles climax towards the evacuation chopper. Rob finally has time to catch his breath.

**Rob:** "So (laughs). That level's a good example of some of our design philosophy of incorporating a lot of variety not only over the entire campaign of the single player, but also in each individual level. You saw we had the stealth element with the heartbeat sensor, the classic action, and then the more high-speed snowmobile action movie experience."

*Rob fiddles with the controller some, bringing up a new level. He mentions in passing that the player will be part of task force 141. In the real world, 141 was the task force responsible for apprehending Saddam Hussein.*

## >> FAVELA

This time Rob is in the passenger seat of a car driving through the city streets of Rio de Janeiro, the second-largest city in Brazil. Outside the car, civilians are ambling about. The driver makes a right turn and mentions that they'd seen the target somewhere in the area. Shots are fired as a situation erupts farther down the road. The driver is shot, blood spraying up against the windshield and over the dashboard. Rob bails out of the car, hooks up with other task force operatives, and starts a chase through the busy Rio streets. Civilian bystanders react to the gunfire, scattering in all directions, screaming. It is utter chaos as Rob chases the target into an alley. The task force commander yells over the radio for a non-lethal takedown, so Rob shoots the man he's chasing in the leg. The man stumbles to the ground, clutching his leg. The target, along



**Robert Bowling**, Infinity Ward  
Community Manager



**Vince Zampella**, Infinity Ward  
Studio Head



with every task force operative and innocent bystander in view, disappears.

**Rob:** "And that's all the gameplay we're going to show for that level."

**NAG:** Spoilsport.

**Rob:** "The lead-up to that mission was that the task force had found some shell casings at an earlier scene, and then tracked them to an arms dealer here in Brazil that runs this favela."

*In Brazil, there are shantytowns in downtown areas of the cities called "favela," created from the rural exodus into the cities by impoverished locals who can't find a place to live. Rob starts moving through the now-abandoned streets of the favela. Towering over the entire city is one of the New Seven Wonders of the World and the symbol of the city, the Cristo Redentor, or Christ Redeemer, rendered in real time with stunning detail.*

**Rob:** "So when you come up to this point, you're going to see civilians playing hacky sack; they're going to be doing their laundry, acting out their daily lives. Firing off a few shots will cause them to scatter. At this point, though, the favela militia will be coming out of the woodwork, and these guys aren't military. They grew up in the favela so they got recruited in. They're in plain clothes, they threw on some LCE [Load Carrying Equipment] and some ammunition belts, and they're trying to stop you from getting up here, and getting to the location that you got from the informant that you just did a non-lethal takedown on."

*LCE, or PLCE, is a tactical webbing system consisting of a belt, yoke [shoulder harness] and a number of pouches for the purpose of holding everything a soldier requires to operate for 48 hours, including ammunition/weapon ancillaries, bayonet, food and water. Close-quarter combat in locations such as favelas is known for being gruelling and tactically disadvantageous for anyone heading into the hot zone. As is clear from Rob moving through the environment, the enemy can appear from anywhere and disappear anywhere, with civilians making for easy distraction or cover."*

**Rob:** "So this area is a good example of some of the new stuff we're doing with the engine. We have texture streaming now. In *Modern Warfare*, we had audio streaming, and that was it; but now we stream everything. That gives us two advantages: one, we can have much larger worlds, much bigger environments, and we can have much more detailed environments that you're fighting in."

*As he takes the camera through a simple back alley, it shows clearly: tufts of grass, litter, flowers, random debris and rubble are all artfully scattered around to create one of the most realistic and utterly unimportant scenes in videogame history.*

**Rob:** "We also have some dynamic shadows and improvements to our lighting."



*At this point, Vince, who had been sitting quietly in the back, could no longer contain his glee. We had - as we would discover - entered a part of the level he enjoyed intimately.*

**Vince:** "The details on everything in close proximity to you are much greater than what we had in the last game, as you can see; like, the shadows are a lot more detailed, and there are a lot more environmental effects. I just love this area, with the little puddles on the ground and stuff. The transitions from the walls to the sidewalks... we can do a lot more natural things to make it look realistic. So pretty! The environmental artists were so happy we were able to give them more memory to work with [laughs]. They just go crazy on this stuff and they love what they do. What they're able to pull off has been amazing. I mean, look at that: it's just an alley! But I don't know - for some reason this one spot is, like, one of my favourite spots in the level."

**Rob:** "They [the environmental artists] will each take a level under their wing, pretty much, and just make it their own." **Vince:** "Reminds me of home [laughs]." **Rob:** "Your hard days in the favela [laughs]? So there're multiple ways you can fight up this hill. We have dynamic AI: they'll be popping out of different windows, using the environment as they know it, running across rooftops, kicking in doors - like trying to find any way they can to get the best angle on you." **Vince:** "Like, look at this right here. And again, it's not huge to the gameplay, but just the way those stairs just look so realistic - it's half broken down, it's kind of buried, it's got weeds coming through it. I mean, some of the time they spend on that stuff is just crazy, amazing. Love it. Gets me all excited."

**Rob:** "We have a lot of dynamic objects through here as well. So, as you're fighting your way through here from different angles and they're shooting down on you, the world's going to react as you expect it to during a real firefight. So, a bullet might graze a transformer, it's going to start sparking and raining down, explode... And this pot plant will fall and break and dirt will go everywhere. We gave the environment artists a lot of tools to just naturally place things around the world as they see fit. So you know, it's not just these scripted set-piece moments that are memorable, but every firefight is an experience."

*Reaching the top of the favela, Rob pulls the camera back to show the entire shantytown we just moved through on the street level. It all remains crisp and in detail, with the backdrop of Rio looking realistic in the distance.*

**Rob:** "So, you can start to see the scale we're able to achieve."

**NAG:** What, weren't you happy with the benchmark you set with *Modern Warfare*?

**Vince:** "I think we thought we were, coming out of that game. We were just like, wow, it's great, and we were able to keep 60Hz, and



just do everything we kind of wanted. But what the guys have been able to pull off with this is just... it's great to be amazed by your team. Every time they turn around and do something new it's like, wow, that's actually better, I love it. And that has a real positive impact on gameplay: it's the freedom to make the levels a little more, y'know, in your vision. You don't have to compromise."

## >> AFGHAN CAVES

*Cycling through some menu options, Rob pulls up another level that - while it appears practically complete - is still in production and lacking things such as enemies, effects and other elements. The viewpoint is from a mountain path overlooking a giant river running through a ravine. In the distance, beyond the canyons, the Afghanistan desert dissolves into the strong heat of the afternoon.*

**Rob:** "So this is another level that shows off some of the scale we can achieve in a different environment. In this one, you get intelligence that there's a high-value target somewhere at these coordinates in the Afghanistan desert. So you get dropped off here in the middle of nowhere, to find your way. As you come across here, you see this jeep and a guy walking his dog into the tunnel. You start to realise there's more here..."

**Vince:** "The dog is a guard dog; not just, like, a Schnauzer." **Rob:** "Well, yeah. Poodles are popular around here [laughs]. You start to realise there's more here than intelligence knew about. You'll come over here and do an Australian rappel down the front side of this cliff. Then you'll find this network of caves, and by this point you'll be making your way through here. They're beginning to become aware of your presence... you fight your way through."

**NAG: It's safe to say that you're pretty comfortable with the hardware of this generation...**

**Vince:** "Yeah, and like we always say: I don't know much more we can wring out of it, but they always find a way to do something. I kind of thought from there [MW], we were going to make incremental improvements, but it's not going to be like that huge leap; like from *Call of Duty 2* to *Modern Warfare*, which was a huge leap - and I think we're able to get a lot more than I had anticipated and hoped for."

*A break in the cave network Rob had been moving through reveals the greater exterior of the desert outside: a huge vista with the river cutting a startling blue dividing sheen through it, the river's surface dappled with reflected sunlight. The unpopulated caves and hidden enemy base Rob meanders through is made all the more surreal by its abandoned nature.*

**Rob:** "What I like about this level is the technology of being able to do these much bigger worlds. We have levels like Cliffhanger that are more open. You can stealth your way anyway you want to through that base and favela where there're multiple paths up the mountain. And this one is more, y'know, straightforward fighting your way

through a network of caves. But you can still use that technology to build a world around it. Just because it's close combat doesn't mean you have to be fighting in a shoebox. You're fighting in a world, and a level like this can benefit just as much from that tech as a level like Cliffhanger."

**NAG: How far into development are you?**

**Vince:** "We're at that point where we know what the game is. We can see the light at the end of the tunnel, but there's a whole lot of work left to do; because we need to finish a lot of the gameplay, and polish. We do a lot of work on polishing and, kind of tuning things, we've got a whole lot of work to do, but we're in a really, really good spot. I know that's not too specific of an answer [laughs]."

**Rob:** "We have a nice schedule. We have certain levels that are playable but we want to really polish. Like Cliffhanger - it's polished but it still has temporary dialogue, and there's a lot of polish to do in the gameplay. And then we have levels like Afghan Caves - the geography's really well done and there're some tweaks for gameplay and scripting that have to be put in; and then there're some levels that still need a lot of work. We're, y'know, early."

## >> EXPLOSIONS AND PEOPLE

*Rob loads up a testing level filled with various objects - lights, bookshelves, fire hydrants... pretty much every incidental destructible object one might come across in the streets, desert or army base. He proceeds to - quite happily - shoot things, throw grenades and cause destruction like a madman. Water flies, lights swing from hinges and things explode, as one would expect them to. Rob makes a point of expressing his dislike of ceiling fans by shooting off each individual blade as it rotates.*

**Vince:** "My favourite thing about all these dynamic objects is they all have varying degrees of destruction. So something's going to react differently from one bullet than it does from a whole magazine or from a direct impact from a grenade, or just splash damage from a grenade."

**Rob:** "So it's all about giving them [the artists] all these tools at their disposal to really bring their environments to life." **Vince:** "We really approach it like we're building an entertainment experience - much like an interactive action movie. So we want that, y'know, you go into a firefight; there're things exploding around you, there's goodness happening everywhere."

*Bringing up another testing level, this time filled with various soldiers, civilians and other assorted characters, Rob flies the camera around each.*

**Rob:** "This is one of our favela guys, the non-military militia - this is one of my favourites. And here is one of the task force guys. We do detail mapping now, in addition to the normal mapping we did in MW. Remember, I was speaking earlier about how we hand sculpt all our character models and gear? The detail mapping lets us get in there and hand sculpt all those little fine details. You can see the bumps on his helmet and

the tape - it's not perfectly flat. It has air bubbles, like you'd expect tape to have. We can get in there and put in all those details you'd lose if it was a scan. The cool thing about Special Ops is they all personalise their gear. So they don't use standard issue. They know what works better; they'll take what they get and redo it or bring in their own gear. So this guy has, like, special goggles on with the vents on the bottom so they don't fog up. It's powered by the battery pack on his ear. You can even see the fabric of the balaclava. He tapes down his antenna so he has a low profile when he's out on the field. This guy tucks his glasses in on the band on his helmet. There's his tactical light."

*The amount of detail on each character model is nothing short of awe-inspiring. The fact that an artist placed each tiny detail, including the fingerprints on various non-opaque surfaces, such as goggles or flashlight coverings, there by hand simply adds to the effect. Many gamers take it for granted that, for the most part, every detail in a game had to be created by someone taking the time to recreate what the natural world does for us automatically, such as dirt on the boots, grime in the folds of clothing and the way duct tape reacts to fabric.*

**Rob:** "This guy's a good example of the character model always matching the weapon load-out... So he is like a Russian Airborne shotgun class - he has the extra shotgun shells on his chest and the duct tape for his fast rope. We always had custom camouflage schemes in multiplayer, but we brought that and the attachment system over to the single-player AI. So, you can see how his weapon camouflage matches his uniform - down to the magazine and the handgrips. And they'll all have varying attachments through single player, so you might kill a guy and pick up a red dot or an EOTech."

*Using lasers and holographic technology, EOTech is the manufacturer of reflex sights. Unlike traditional red-dot sights, EOTech holographic sights allow for far lower errors in sighting through them for aiming at distant targets.*

**Rob:** "This guy's Navy SEAL. Love him. We get right down to the preferences of the





soldiers and the personality we can add to each character. As you can see, this guy has his BDU [Battle Dress Uniform] pants, because we found that some Navy SEALs like to wear their BDU pants over their wetsuits because they found that their gear, like their kneepads and their holsters, grip better to the BDU material than wetsuit material. But it's all about our preference, so you can have a whole squad of Navy SEAL guys and none of them look the same, even though they're all wearing legit gear."

*Flying the camera around the room, Rob focuses on a Navy SEAL swimming idly inside what looks like a giant fish tank.*

**Rob:** "I like this guy."

**Vince:** "I love the custom fish tank."

**Rob:** "It's like Hellboy. This guy's all like straight up - driving gear down to the flippers and the breathing apparatus. We just do so much with the detail mapping. The fabrics, the detail on the weapons, knife."

*As if to drive the point home just how much of a sociopath he actually is, Rob drops the game back into traditional first-person shooting mode and then proceeds to shoot all the characters in the room while admiring the gun he's doing all the killing with.*

**Rob:** "So we even put all the detail mapping on to our weapons as well as the arm, the GPS unit. We have a lot of new weapons in *Modern Warfare 2*, but any favourites we brought back from *MW*, we've completely redone. An update version or a new paint job, or we added personality elements like you see how it's animated on the tassel of this gun where you put the assault strap. This is the updated MP5, called the MP5K. This is the EOTech, which we had in *MW* single player, but now it's been completely redone with some of the new details we can do - like you can see how it's a real lens that reacts to the world lighting: if you zoom in you can see the fingerprints on it. So all these things that give even the weapons a lot of personality, most people may never even notice."

**Vince:** "The view models are pretty important; they're basically on the screen almost 100% of the time, so we put a lot more work into them... We redid all the models and textures to give them that extra level of polish."





Ambling into a side room of the character testing level, Rob unloads a clip into a guy holding up a riot shield and nearly kills himself.

**Rob:** "(Laughs) The bullets ricochet off a riot shield, so you have to be careful. If you shoot the guy in the back just right, he'll splatter blood up on the inside of the shield. Like this."

### >> SPECIAL OPS MODE

Even though the studio isn't ready to talk about multiplayer elements of the game yet - so any and all questions about maps, multiplayer weapons, perks, vehicles, kill streak rewards, character classes and ranking systems were politely declined - one aspect of multiplayer Vince and Rob were more than happy to elaborate on was the specially crafted co-op Spec Ops Mode.

**Rob:** "So this is our Special Ops Mode, which is separate from the single-player campaign. In single player, we put a lot of emphasis on our story. The important thing with story is pacing, so sometimes you'll have those missions that are really intense, really challenging and then maybe toned down for the pace of the single-player campaign. But they're still really fun when they're at that challenging level, so you don't want to lose that. So some of those might get cut, altered or tweaked in single player for gameplay reasons, so we take these out, put them in Spec Ops mode, keep them super intense and super challenging. Do you remember the Mile High Club from *MW*? Yeah, so the super intense focus combat... don't need story or overarching plot, they're just fun gameplay."

**Vince:** "You can challenge yourself, challenge your friends. See who has the best time."

*The level shown is set in a prison shower area. Rob breaks through a wall in slow motion after planting a detonation charge, and it's chaos from the start. Laser sights knot on his location, so he's forced to move from cover to cover as shattered bathroom tiles fly from enemy fire peppering his location. Rob lasts all of a minute before being put down.*

**Rob:** "So they're meant to be mastered."

**Vince:** "Yeah."

**Rob:** "And then, if you can't beat it on your own, you can have a friend join you in co-op."

**NAG:** Will that only be local, or will it have online co-op?

**Vince:** "Well, we're not talking about multiplayer right now in detail, but split screen is a definite."

*Rob pairs another controller and hands it to Vince, and they set about playing the same level in split-screen co-op (the split screen maintains aspect ratio). It's just as chaotic as before, but this time Rob runs over to rescue Vince when Vince is downed. On Vince's screen, he gets a "bleed out" countdown timer - Rob has that much time to get over*

*to Vince and hit X. Meanwhile, Vince can still cover Rob by shooting from the ground (much akin to Left 4 Dead in this regard). They are ripped to shreds regardless.*

**Rob:** "So, we plan on having a lot of those. Some will be taken directly from the single player, some crafted specifically for that mode. There's a lot of flexibility and potential on what we could do."

**NAG:** We realise you're not commenting on multiplayer or online yet, but it's a safe bet there might be DLC additions to such levels in the future...

**Rob:** "Potentially."

**Vince:** "We really don't put much thought into DLC until after the game is done. We're kind of just focused on getting this done, and making it the best it can be. Then we think we're going to take a break after, and rest, and then like 'OH S\*\*T, DLC!'"

**NAG:** Is there more you can show us?

**Rob:** "Nope, that's it! That is it for now, for the first look."

## Infinity Ward



If you were to travel to Encino, California, and park under the right nondescript building, take an elevator up to ground floor, then a different elevator up yet another floor, you'd stumble across Infinity Ward. Occupying but a single floor of the giant office building, the game development studio was founded in 2002 by two 'scoops' of former 2015, Inc. developers - their previous work was the solitary *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*. The studio was acquired by Activision in 2003. Their first title, *Call of Duty*, won over a hundred awards of varying degrees. Its sequel, *Call of Duty 2*, sold more than a million units in the United States alone. After that, the studio created *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, a critical and commercial success. By Western standards, Infinity Ward is a modest studio: around 180 employees, push-scooters for traversing the hall to and from the snack room (with fully stocked drink coolers), a miniature arcade with classics (the staff are big *Street Fighter* fans) and an admittedly underutilised gym. The humble environment and size of the studio betray the quality and scope of their projects, as fans of the games can attest.







"It's not just these **scripted set-piece moments that are memorable**, but every firefight is an experience."

Robert Bowling, *Infinity Ward*



"The details on everything in **close proximity to you are much greater** than what we had in the last game"

Vince Zampella, *Infinity Ward*



## ODDS & ENDS: Q&A WITH ROB AND VINCE

**NAG:** What kind of length for the campaign are we looking at here?

**Rob:** "We let our story dictate the length of the game, so we never really set a bar like 'we're making an eight-hour game', or 'we're making X'. We tell a very specific story, and we put a lot of work into that story. So if that ends up being longer, then it's going to be longer and we'll work to get there. We'll never add filler just to get to a certain mile mark."

**Vince:** "It needs to be the most fun experience it can be. We don't want to artificially inflate the length by making you traverse empty gameplay, empty levels or you know. It's hard to tell right now, but with our levels being bigger, it'll probably be a little longer than our last one."

**Rob:** "With the new technology of the bigger levels, we have that benefit of the player constantly seeing new environments, constantly seeing new gameplay - we don't want to add in filler where you're playing anything repetitive just to be repetitive. There are a lot of cool things we can do with the story that give way to a lot of cool gameplay elements."

**NAG:** Any comment on the rumours that *Modern Warfare* is a trilogy now because of the "3" seen in the teaser?

**Rob:** "That is completely fan speculation. I like when they pick out things we never even saw. Its like, 'Oh, I can see how you could come to that conclusion.'"

**NAG:** This is the first time you as a company have done a direct sequel in this manner.

**Vince:** "Yup, and that's why we're calling it out, making sure people know that, cause a lot of the other ones have been fairly separate or completely separate [laughs]. A continuation of the story it's just great. The main idea behind removing *Call of Duty* from the name is just to let people know it's a sequel to *Modern Warfare*. It's not anything; it's not a knock on *Call of Duty*, it's still a *Call of Duty* game. It's just, y'know, we don't want this to be 'Call of Duty 6'. It's not. It's just *Modern Warfare 2*. It's just a sequel to *Modern Warfare*."

**NAG:** So, removing the name was not to distance yourself from Treyarch's renditions of the series (*Call of Duty 3* and *5*).

**Rob:** "[Laughs] No, it's to bring us closer to our own game."

**NAG:** While on the subject, and even though we're aware that *Infinity Ward* had nothing to do with *Call of Duty: World at War*, we have to ask anyway: will *Modern Warfare 2* have anything like the *Zombie mode* from *CoD: WaW*?

**Vince:** "No. But there will be fun amazing co-op and fun amazing multiplayer, so nobody will be bored - they will have plenty to be addicted to."

**NAG:** We've seen the snowmobile

vehicle section. Will there be more along those lines, like the helicopter gun section in *MW*?

**Vince:** "Where they fit the story. We're not, y'know, forcing them in. If there are areas in the game where something like that fits, it'll be there. If it's not, we're okay with it."

**Rob:** "We like the designers to have a lot of freedom to know what works best for the experience they're crafting for that mission. We don't ever tell anyone, okay, we have a set number of vehicle sections, now someone has to cram a vehicle section into their level."

**NAG:** We maintain that there is a special place in developer hell for developers who do the checkbox thing: "we must have a vehicle section, we must have X, Y and Z..."

**Rob:** "[Laughs] Whoops, time to add a quick-time event!"

**Vince:** "[Laughs] 'Wait a minute, what's the big buzzword today? Oh, we need feature X!' Yeah, we've never been big on forcing buzzwords into the game. When we shipped *CoD2*, we didn't have 'Full Physics'; we had little things designed for specific elements of the game where it needed it... 'You can't ship a game without full physics! It's the big buzzword!' Err, yeah. Actually I think we can. Because how does that help our game?"

**NAG:** The teddy bear makes a brief appearance in the *MW2* trailer... Rob: "Yeah, he's been a character in our games, in all the *CoD* games."

**Vince:** "We're just kids at heart."

**NAG:** With the game due on 10 November this year and by your own admission there being a lot left to complete, it must almost be serious crunch time?

**Rob:** "We have a nice flow of, like, mini crunch periods and polish periods throughout development, so not just that big 24-hour grind at the end."

**Vince:** "Because you get that thing where it's, like, you say Alpha on the game is on like this date, but that's for the entire game. Now before that we have a Code Alpha and then a Design Alpha, and then a, y'know, where you finish up the code features and then the designers have to put them in the game. And then you have a polish phase after that, so it's like a lot of little milestones along the way."

**NAG:** Are you using the same Military Advisor from *MW*?

**Vince:** "Hank? Yeah, we are using Hank, although he just went to..."

**Rob:** "Iraq."

**Vince:** "...Iraq, so he probably won't be doing any of the press stuff this time. I think he's on, like, a year tour."

**Rob:** "He's going to be 'indisposed of.'"

**Vince:** "He couldn't tell us exactly what it was." **NAG:** Something important then?

**Vince:** "Yeah."

**Rob:** "(Whispering) He can't be stopped!"

**Vince:** "So he's over in Iraq right now, training up some forces."

**NAG:** The innocent bystanders in the Rio de Janeiro level are another first. How will you be dealing with players gunning them down?

**Vince:** "Yeah, a new addition. You can't have a level like that without civilians. We don't encourage it [shooting them]. Perhaps we'll do something to discourage it. If you're going around shooting all of them, you're obviously not playing the game as intended."

**NAG:** But someone will go and do just that, of course.

**Vince:** "Yeah, that'll be Robert."

**Rob:** "[Laughs]"

**Vince:** "But yeah, casualties happen. We may have an achievement for not shooting any."





**Rob:** "Obviously you're encouraged to check your targets and take down lethal targets, but the big thing about task forces is they're going after high-value targets - where you have to understand the greater good of some might get hurt in the process of taking down someone powerful that might hurt many more later. It's the key staple of being in that elite force."

**NAG:** The waveform motif is integrated into your menu system here. Where did that come from?

**Vince:** "Honestly, it came out of the teaser; that's where it all kind of came from. Now that we've put it out there, the first thing people saw of MW2 was that, so we kept it. It's interesting, it's cool, and so we like it."

"We have dynamic AI: they'll be **popping out of different windows, using the environment as they know it**, running across rooftops, kicking in doors..."

Robert Bowling, *Infinity Ward*

**NAG:** What's the one thing you would really want to tell fans of MW about MW2? If they're fans, they're already amped, but what's that kind of, like, cherry on top you could tell them?

**Rob:** "The big thing is that this is the direct sequel, so a lot of the favourites we're bringing over. And we had a huge community with MW. We had 12 million people who we could go to and ask, 'What do you want to see in MW2?'. And since it's a direct sequel, we had a lot of flexibility in stuff we could bring over and tweak, and improve on. And building off that great base of adding new stuff. So, y'know, there're characters in the first one you played as: you played as Soap MacTavish, and now he's the captain of the task force. We're continuing the story that we began in MW, and then, on the MP side, building off the success of [the first one], tweaking stuff, bringing back favourites and doing new stuff based on feedback."

**Vince:** "I think it was a daunting task starting out, considering how successful *Modern Warfare* went on to be. We kind of set out, 'Okay, now we have to make something that's as good as that, but better' and how do you do that? But everything kind of came together to just really... I think we've done it. It's got so many just great moments, it's got all the good stuff from the last game, and then a ton of new stuff. And on the multiplayer side, and we're not talking too much about it, but there're some really amazing advances on the multiplayer side. If you liked MWMP, you will really enjoy the new stuff."

**NAG:** MW's narrative showed many angles by having you play multiple characters involved in the situation... Will MW2 follow that narrative style?

**Rob:** "We have multiple perspectives - we like that. Perspectives are cool because they give context to the overall conflict, so you can see how your actions are impacting, y'know, multiple stages in an operation."

**Vince:** "You can tell a bigger story."

**NAG:** How was the response to the Twitter "give us your suggestions" campaign?

**Rob:** "It was great!"

**Vince:** (to Rob) "Do you have a count - how many?"

**Rob:** We're approaching 400,000 suggestions. Just from that one question: 'What's one thing you would like to see in MW2?'"

**Vince:** "We're gonna put all 400,000 in [laughs]."

**Rob:** "So yeah, that's been great, and as we get further into development, we're going to be using that to get more and more specific. Like 'Name one specific thing you want'. That is very vague, and then later on, once we start talking about multiplayer, we can give specific questions like, 'Hey, do you like this? What do you think of Martyrdom?' Y'know, we have that liberty - not a lot of developers have the luxury of going to 12 million people and asking a question. It's good for not only getting inspiration for new stuff, but also for checking yourself in the



way of, like, 'Here's what we have in our vision, let's see how that adds up to what they have envisioned'."

**Vince:** "We use feedback a lot, because we have in-house testing. Even now, we bring people in every week, we sit them down and we watch... Did you show him the focus room?"

**Rob:** "Yeah."

**Vince:** "We bring people in there, we watch and record what they do, we see where they get stuck, what they like what they hate. And to be able to do that and now solicit feedback on the old stuff, especially the multiplayer side, directly, not just on, like, comb through forums, but direct feedback on why I like this or hate that... Feedback, testing, tuning - it's all huge for us."

#### **NAG: Is MW2 built up from the MW engine?**

**Vince:** "We added texture streaming. The renderer is totally new actually, redone with extra precision - the high dynamic-range lighting, better precision on the shadows..."

**Rob:** "And new physics. All the weapons have physics now; all the dynamic objects have physics. The grenades have physics now. So it's not just about where the grenade ricochets, but if it lands on top of stairs and starts rolling down, it gains momentum, and it definitely changes the way you use grenades."

**Vince:** "Even the suspension... you saw the snowmobiles when they're jumping up in the air. That's all tied to the physics system. And when he was shooting the guys off the snowmobiles and they were tumbling, that's all tied to the physics system. Our guys don't like to sit still."

#### **NAG: What's your primary developer platform?**

**Vince:** "It [360] was on our last game, just because it's the engine we had to work with, and we were moving it over to the PS3. But at this point it works on all three, so it's really a kind of simultaneous development. We got some guys who are just maniacs at tearing into hardware and just love what they do and they live in that world, and... God bless 'em."

#### **NAG: A specific scene in MW involving a nuke seems a tough act to top.**

**Vince:** "It is. It is a tough one"

**Rob:** "Every story has its climax and its twists and its turns, and we definitely have them in the story. So there's a lot of story to tell, and a lot of techniques to use to tell it."

**Vince:** "Did you show him the tractor beam that's pulling the moon down?"

**Rob:** "I did not show the moon being pulled down."

**Vince:** "We have some moments in MW2 that are, y'know, equally story impactful."

#### **NAG: Will all the weapons be staying grounded in reality, or will there be more sci-fi stuff?**

**Vince:** "Well, like you saw, we have the motion tracker. That's obviously one, that, you know, 'is based on some real-life tech' but doesn't work like that."

**Rob:** "We like to be authentic in the gear you use and the weapons you use, but we also, you know, we're telling a fun action experience. So you're going to stealth into a Russian base with real weapons and gear and fight your way out, but in real life you might not necessarily escape on a snowmobile with a helicopter chasing you."

**Vince:** "I think that's totally plausible."

**Rob:** "Yeah, I would do it."

#### **NAG: Will your load-out always be predetermined?**

**Vince:** "In SP, you're pretty well kitted out. Immerse yourself in the experience, have fun. But you will pick up an enemy's weapon and that attachments system from MP exists, so you might pick up an enemy's weapon and it might have a red-dot scope on it now."

**Rob:** "We put a lot of weapons into the

"You go into a firefight; **there're things exploding around you,** there's goodness happening everywhere."

Vince Zampella, *Infinity Ward*



world, so you could swap out and change your play style. Like in Cliffhanger, we give you the heartbeat sensor with the suppressor for stealth, or you can swap out with the AK and fight your way through there. It'd be a lot harder, but you could do it if you wanted."

**NAG:** Will there be any kind of "infinite spawning" of enemies?

**Rob:** "The new dynamic AI encourages the player to move on - they'll always be flanking them, instead of doing the infinite spawn thing. They understand the environment: this is a ladder, this is a window, I can kick through this door, get to this rooftop. They'll use that to get the best vantage point, which forces you to move up because you're being outflanked and outnumbered in that way. The enemies that exist in the world are better using the environment to get behind you."

**Vince:** "Advances to the AI. It's a lot of little things: they understand elevation and path-finding stuff better. We blend a lot of the animation. When they go up to a corner, they peek around the corner. Everything's kind of tied together with AI and animation - with how they move. We've done a lot of work advancing that. The characters will move a lot more believably." **NAG**

## Co-op campaign

**NAG:** Will there be co-op play for the campaign mode?

**Vince:** "No. Honestly, I think that makes the story weaker. You have to change the way the gameplay is structured to accommodate one or two players. So, which one are you doing it for? It's not going to be perfect for both. If you're playing it as one player, it's not as good; or it's designed for one player, so the co-op's kind of forced in there."

**Rob:** "There're some moments in single player that work really well in co-op. Those we can take out, put into Special Ops, and have them optimised for co-op play. But missions like Cliffhanger, where it's you and Soap, and he's your wingman... it's just not as fun with two players. So we don't want to sacrifice a story we worked really hard on, again, for just a buzzword. But it's not that co-op is bad. Co-op is fun in certain areas."

**Vince:** "Yeah, co-op is great."

**Rob:** "That's why we have Special Ops." **Vince:** "And now, we have co-op mode designed to be, specifically, co-op mode."

All the weapons **have physics now**; all the dynamic objects **have physics**. The grenades have physics now.

Robert Bowling, *Infinity Ward*



Crossing streams: Fun at the urinal, but no so much with proton packs



## Ghostbusters: The Video Game

Who you gonna call? (Yes, we went there.)

Genre→ First-Person Shooter

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**TWENTY YEARS IS A** long time to wait for anything, and in an industry that starts producing sequels before the original films are even on circuit, it's practically forever. Thankfully, the gaming industry got tired of waiting for *Ghostbusters III* and decided to take matters into its own ectoplasm-dripping hands. While there have been *Ghostbusters* games before, they were based on existing IP. This *Ghostbusters* is an all-new sequel to the movies, complete with new (and old) villains, characters and punch lines.

Written by Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis (two of the original *Ghostbusters*), *Ghostbusters: The Video Game* has had a bumpy journey on its way to the upcoming release this month. It has switched publishers numerous times (largely due to the Activision/Blizzard merger, when it was dropped off Vivendi's release schedule) and even traded developers in its early years. Now, the game is almost complete and looks like it'll finally be creeping its way on to store shelves for PS3 and PS2 owners, with the PSP release due out a few months later. Thanks to Sony's last-minute wheeling and dealing, the remaining platform releases (Xbox 360, Wii and DS) will be left out in the cold, presumably to be published by Atari once the timed exclusive has worn off (end of the year).

The year is 1991 – two years after the second film. Peter Venkman, Egon Spengler and Ray Stantz are training their latest recruit (the player) in the fine art of destroying everything around them in order to catch a ghost, when Slimer breaks out of his containment cell and

goes flying off towards the Sedgewick Hotel – the location where they first captured the green menace in the original film. The troop goes off to recapture the blighter when they discover that Slimer's not the only ghost in town, and things go from bad to worse at an alarming rate. Of course, all of this just so happens to occur at the same time as a Gozer (the evil shape-shifting god from the first film) exhibit is about to begin at the local museum. One Stay Puft Marshmallow Man, a dozen gargoyles and a horde of spectres later, and the Ghostbusters decide further investigation might be in order.

To combat the infinite undead, the Ghostbusters will be using a combination of classic tools like the trusty Proton Pack, ghost traps, PKE Meters and Para goggles, and new, experimental and highly volatile (and therefore assigned to the player, who's been nominated the Experimental Equipment Technician) gadgets such as Boson Dart, Slime Tethers, Slime Blasters and Stasis Beams. And what better way to test your new tools than on a room full of physics-enabled books, tables, chairs and kitchenware? Almost all objects in the game can be smashed to pieces, flung about, or in the more extreme circumstances, pulled together by an ethereal entity to form a giant hulking golem. Thankfully, things have changed since the films, and our intrepid saviours of the city have finally been declared as such by the Mayor of New York, who will happily (or not, it doesn't really matter) foot the bill for the thousands and thousands of dollars worth of damage you'll cause in a few minutes of ghost wrangling.

Catching a ghost can be tough, but





from what we've experienced, it's a lot of fun. While much of the game plays like any other third-person shooter (and is jokingly called "Gears of War Light" by the developers), the key difference lies in hunting and trapping the various ghosts, spooks and spectres throughout the game. These foes are a wily bunch, requiring large amounts of effort and determination to be worn out and eventually pulled into the conical field of the ghost traps. Different ghosts behave in different ways, with some 'possessing' nearby objects like tables, fridges or silverware and others using special attacks on the lads. You'll need to be on

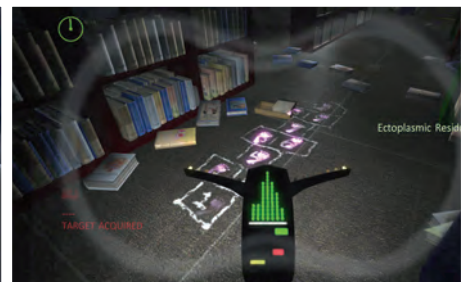
your toes to bring down even the smallest spectre and even more so to tackle the bosses (did I mention the Marshmallow Man's new flaming marshmallow minions? Tough crowd).

It's not all heart-pounding high adventure, however. Between the numerous battles, you'll get a chance to kick back with the Ghostbusters and the new characters and listen to the snappy comments rolling out. All the original core voice actors are back and their in-game character's likeness portrays each facial nuance brilliantly. Venkman is still a wannabe lady-killer. Ray takes charge of any situation he's not running away

"Almost all objects in the game can be smashed to pieces, flung about, or in the more extreme circumstances, pulled together by an ethereal entity to form a giant hulking golem."



And you thought museums were boring.



from. Egon is only too happy to share his latest experiment with the newcomer, and Winston is still the only one who openly admits that this bunch is actually making up most of their strategies on the fly. The developers have stated that it's their goal to have something fun, funny or scary happen at least every 15 seconds. It's a hell of a target, but from what we've played so far, they're well on their way to achieving it, largely thanks to Ramis and Aykroyd's delightfully funny writing. Between combats, you'll have a chance to wield the impressive new PKE Meter Mark II and don the classic Para goggles as you hunt down your next target. Despite the comedic relief you experience throughout most of the game, the hunting sequences are surprisingly creepy. These lulls in gameplay force the game's pace to dip and then rise unexpectedly as a

ghost suddenly blasts out of the display cabinet or wall lamp you were examining – keeping players on their toes (or at least on the edge of their seats) at all times.

To round off the package, tons of unlockable pieces of classic *Ghostbusters* references (remember the toaster?) as well as informative tidbits on the game's many ghostly foes can be collected through your adventures. Sure, much of the game could be seen as 'fan-service'. It's been twenty long years since we've had more core *Ghostbusters* story, and while there's a new film on the way, this is the best thing any fan of the brand can expect for some time. For those unfamiliar with the films, now is a great time to do some catching up – you've got at least a few weeks and at most a few months before it arrives on your console of choice.

**NAG**  
**Geoff Burrows**





## Anno 1404

Welcome to the Orient (we have ponies)

Genre→ City-building Management RTS

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**G**ERMAN DEVELOPMENT STUDIO **SUNFLOWERS'** popular *Anno* series has been going strong for a while. What started in 1998 as *Anno 1602* has grown from strength to strength over the years by combining the core elements of city-building management simulators with real-time strategy. Each iteration of the game 'learns' from the previous title and expansions, and with the last in the series - *Anno 1701* - proving to be a winner with just a couple of faults, *Anno 1404* is set to keep the tradition alive by not only refining previous mechanics, but adding a whole new dimension to the game by giving players access to a second unique faction for the very first time.

For those unfamiliar with the series, *Anno 1404* (like its predecessors) is a city-building, resource-management real-time strategy game in which players travel the vast oceans in search of lands to colonise and resources to plunder. While they're at it, players go about upgrading their population's living conditions, houses, access to goods and, if they've irked a few competitive explorers, their military capabilities. *Anno* has always had a knack of finding the fine balance between all of this by not giving players direct control over their individual serfs, to which it gives free reign to go about their business of chopping wood, getting drunk and shouting profanities at any incompetent leaders that dare neglect their needs. The key lies in the management of everything else.

With *Anno 1404*, not only are players taken further back into history than ever

before, but - based on the continued suggestions of thousands of rabid fans - a second fully-playable faction has been introduced into the game - The Orient. The game still follows a precedent similar to previous titles: you're a generic European who's been given a ship with a few resources and commanded to go forth and conquer, but this time you'll run into the Oriental settlements in your travels. Inhabiting the desert islands of the East, The Orient comes equipped with its own technology and resource trees, and progress requirements for getting to that highest tier of civilisation. The two factions will have to work hand in hand if anyone plans to climb that ladder.

While you're off exploring the lands of the Orient, your population back home is going to need a lot more than boring old fish if they're to progress to the next stage of humanity. They need a little something to spice up their lives - literally. Once you've satisfied that need, it's silk, mosaics, dates, carpets and all manner of exotic Oriental imports if you plan on having a colony filled with much more than club-wielding peasants. To aid you in meeting those requirements, Sunflowers has gone out of its way to implement a powerful, programmable trading system that lets you plot trade nodes throughout your and your ally's colonies, set goods to automatically be bought and sold at your harbours and send regular shipments of produced or purchased goods to that whining island that keeps complaining life isn't varied enough. Through this system, entire islands can be dedicated to produce one product (as each island only has the fertility to allow the farming of certain goods such as apples, hemp or wheat), or assigned to simply house as many people as possible without producing any

It'll take more than a bottle of rum to make peace with these guys



goods at all. Tools like this go a long way to not only pull in the newcomers who appreciate a level of automation in their management titles, but also as a way to allow veteran players to create complex trade routes that keep the cash coming in and their attention spent on managing cities or military endeavours.

With newcomers in mind, it really does seem like *Anno 1404* might be the one to bring in more than ever before. Management simulators are traditionally complex and challenging titles from beginning to end, and after Ubisoft's ever-so-slightly 'dumbed-down' end-game content in *Anno 1701*, they've all learnt that it's not just simplicity that non-veterans crave; it's loads of very pretty graphics. Built completely from scratch, the game's two independent engines (one running the visuals, while the other manages everything under the hood) will work together to produce what is possibly the best-looking management game yet (even rivaling the gorgeous *Civilization IV*), but it won't leave veterans longing for the technical stuff, either. Fully geometric waves crash



## Diplomatic community

The game also features a decent, although not overly complex diplomacy system for players to get to grips with. While it's not nearly as advanced as the like of Civilization's, it does offer a twist on the regular colonising tasks by giving players a few options to declare war, demand or pay tributes, or even bribe the local Arabic pirates to trade their pillaged wares with you. It's not terribly advanced, but as is the case with everything we've experienced so far, it fits the balance of the game and feels 'just right'.



"...it's silk, mosaics, dates, carpets and all manner of exotic **Oriental imports** if you plan on having a colony filled with much more than club-wielding peasants."



**Harbours:** Think of them as 15th Century Ultra Cities without a Wimpy

against moored vessels; their cloth-simulated sails flapping in the breeze while crewmembers mill about checking inventory and barking orders at one another. Even with the pre-release code we've been tinkering with, everything is looking very polished. The attention to detail that Sunflowers delivers is definitely impressive. Townsfolk will go about their daily lives; visiting the local market to haggle with the shopkeepers, stagger home drunk after a late night at the tavern, tend to their small vegetable gardens at home and even rush to the nearest fountain with buckets in hand when a nearby house decides it's time to spontaneously combust. Each house will also have a unique look to it; some with garden sheds, others with

washing lines (complete with more of the aforementioned breeze-flapping linens), some with small walls surrounding them or even complete with a functional well. All of this adds up to a truly unique-looking city from start to finish.

While it's likely not going to appeal to everyone, *Anno 1404* looks set to be the management title of the year, if the pre-release code is anything to go by. The game mechanics are polished, it looks great and most importantly, it's a fantastic combination of 'entertaining' and 'challenging'. Definitely one to keep an eye out for if you're in any way interested in management simulators or even more macro-focused, real-time strategy games like *Supreme Commander*. **NAG**

**Geoff Burrows**



These friendly blokes are fighting over an important strategic location - booze is hard to come by in Nazi-occupied France...



## The Saboteur

Your headquarters is a brothel. What more could you ask for?

Genre→ Third-person Stealth/Action

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**SEAN DEVLIN** IS A member of the Morini racing team. He's an Irishman living the good life in Paris at the start of *The Saboteur*, until the Nazis go and screw everything up by invading the French capital, starting a war that Sean wants no part in. However, he can't hide forever from the horror that is the Nazi occupation of France during World War II and eventually a series of events forces Devlin to retaliate against the Nazis in response to their brutal treatment of the people he loves. With no other choice, Sean decides to fight back, and kick-starts the Parisian chapter of the IRA, blowing things up all over the city.

*The Saboteur* may take place during WWII, but don't expect to single-handedly attempt to take down Hitler as Mr Devlin. Sean just wants revenge against certain Nazi officers and you're going to help him achieve that when the game hits the shelves. It's an open-world action game, but this is no *Grand Theft Auto*. The Nazi occupation will be a hindrance in *The Saboteur*, so you won't be running amok, stealing cars, shooting prostitutes and causing general panic as you would in a game like *Saints Row*. Instead, there'll be a heavy emphasis on stealth, with plenty of silent-kill manoeuvres and sneaky acrobatics to go hand in hand with the crazy action that the game will inevitably feature. A highly detailed version of Paris+"" complete with landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower and the famed cabaret club, the Moulin Rouge – will be available to the player for all sorts of tomfoolery, and it'll be possible to clamber your way to the top of most of the buildings



throughout the city. Aside from the main story missions, there will be a number of side-quests and distractions to keep you occupied. It's been hinted that events will occur around the city that will leave you with a moral dilemma: do you ignore that unfortunate citizen about to be executed in the middle of the street, or do you help the poor sap and bring half the Nazis in the city down on your head? Assassination, sabotage, rescuing damsels and smoking thousands of cigarettes – it's all in a day's work for Sean Devlin and you'll be joining him every step of the way.

**NAG**  
**Dane Remendes**

**If the Nazis don't kill you, the cigarettes will**



**The Saboteur is contender for a Game of the Year award in the "Best 'Splosions" category**



### Colour conundrum

At the start of the game, Paris will be portrayed as a bustling city filled with dreams of a great future, which will be reinforced by the game's colourful and bright scenery. However, following the Nazi occupation, the world shifts to black-and-white hues and sombre tones to symbolise the hopelessness, despair and low morale of the people. In these dark times, splashes of contrastingly bright colours highlight areas of interest around the city. However, the game world will once again be washed with colour as you liberate sections of the city from Nazi oppression. Not only does this give the game a striking visual style, but it's also a unique game mechanic and it can almost be thought of as an in-game progress meter – the more sections of the city to which you have returned colour, the further along you are in the game.





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## Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood

Grab a six-shooter... we're heading to the saloon!

Genre→ First-Person Shooter

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**T**HE ORIGINAL *CALL OF Juarez* was a fun romp in a setting that is often overlooked by game developers – that of the Wild West. The game told the tale of two characters: one simply known as “Billy” and the other a former gunslinger turned Reverend by the name of Ray McCall. The game offered two contrasting styles of play by placing players in the shoes of both characters at different stages of the game. Billy’s segments involved lots of sneakiness, bows, arrows and some light platform action, while Ray’s sections were more focused on all-out gunslinger action. It had its fair share of problems, but I thoroughly enjoyed what the title had to offer. *Bound in Blood* looks set to offer more of the same thing.

*Bound in Blood* ‘acts’ as a prequel and will take place a number of years before the beginning of the first game. Ray makes an appearance once again, this time together with his brother Thomas. Like its forebear’s Billy/Ray dynamic, in *Bound in Blood* you’ll be taking control of both brothers at different points while playing the game. It seems as though most missions will present the choice to play as either brother at their outset, and your choice affects what weapons and abilities you’ll be able to use when playing. The AI will take control of your in-game brother during most missions, so it appears that you won’t be alone very often throughout the game. Ray is once again the more gung-ho of the two, being able to dual wield pistols and kick down some locked doors. Thomas is the more agile of the two and has access to weapons like a bow and items such as the lasso to get to



hard-to-reach areas. Concentration Mode returns, which will slow down time and allow you to quickly take down enemies en masse. It’s essentially bullet time and you build it up by killing enemies. The game also features a few simple cooperative moments, such as one where the brothers will stack up on a set of double doors, simultaneously kick them down, and then blast away in unison at anything that moves as you enter the room. There seems to be plenty of Spaghetti Western-inspired sequences running amok in this game’s code, such as one scene in which you’ll be riding shotgun on a horse-drawn wagon as a town full of angry, gun-toting folks shoot bullets at your face because you slept with the local sheriff’s daughter. The quick-draw gunfights also make a return, usually when fighting bosses, and involve using the mouse to keep your hand near your pistol and circling your opponent to ensure that you always have your sights trained on him. You’ll be listening for a church bell and when it goes off, you’ll quickly have to grab hold of your gun and fill your opponent with lead before he has an opportunity to do the same to you. Free-form sections,



where you can take on odd jobs that’ll earn you some cash to buy weapons for the mission ahead, will precede certain missions. The game will have multiplayer, but unfortunately, I didn’t get a chance to give it a bash. From what I’ve experienced of the game, it’s got the ‘feeling’ of playing a part in a classic, well-emulated Western just right, with visuals and audio that suit the era the game is set in perfectly. **NAG**

**Dane Remendes**

**Playing as Ray allows for a more gung-ho approach to missions, with all the dual-wielding action and excitement that he provides.**





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# Need for Speed: Shift

## Interview with Stephen Viljoen

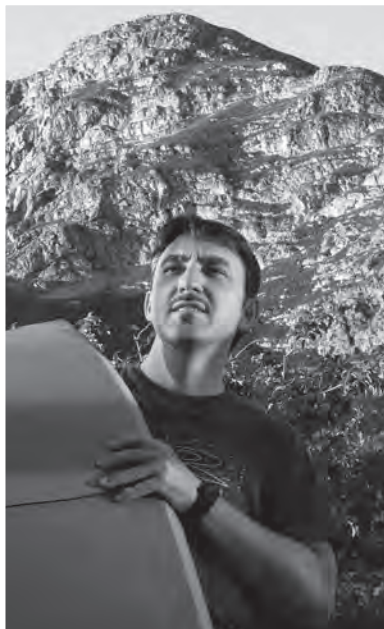
**WE RECENTLY HAD A** chance to sit down and chat to Slightly Mad Studio's chief operating officer, Stephen Viljoen, to ask him about developing a game with a distributed development system, his history of game development and what he thinks is the best way to break into the industry.

### How big is your team?

"Internally at Slightly Mad Studios, active guys developing are right around 95 developers and we're growing all the time. Our distributed development model allows us to harvest talent from all over the world without requiring people to relocate."

### How do you do that? You said you are in Cape Town; that you live there. What tools do you use to communicate with the rest of the studio?

"We basically have a central forum that we use for all sorts of discussions, development tracking, daily reports and anything that doesn't need to be discussed in real time. For anything real time we use MSN and Skype, your direct chat stuff, and basically everybody is online all the time. At any point in time I can bring up MSN or Skype, click on a person and start talking. We actually have a more solid communication infrastructure than most traditional companies where everyone sits in one office building. In a traditional office, everybody is often just doing their own thing, where here, everybody knows what everybody else is doing and everybody has input on what everybody else is doing. The forum is open to everybody who's on the team. So I can, at any point in time, follow what the coding guys are doing, and if I have an idea or input and I think 'this might work', I can post it there. Likewise, the artist who does textures for cars can give input on the game design by posting his opinion; because all the discussions are there and open for anybody to participate in."



### So it's like design by committee.

"It sort of is, but it's not collective stupidity [laughs]; it's more like a 'big brain', if you will."

### And how do you go about recruiting people?

"A lot of it is word of mouth. For example, we have people who have worked in other companies and who knows somebody that has left their previous company who is available for freelance contracting. Sometimes we use recruitment agencies, but most of our guys come from personal experience – when somebody knows their work, or somebody who works with us knows their work motive and how good they are, then they'll recommend the person and we'll take it from there. That's how we've grown. One of the reasons why we've been so successful with this development style is because



"... people who are not passionate about what they do simply don't last"



people who are not passionate about what they do simply don't last, and people who aren't passionate about what they do traditionally don't join this type of thing. It's transparent; so you know that if you're going to be skiving, it's going to be obvious immediately. We don't have to police people, something you'd normally expect to do in a system like this, because everyone is so passionate. If anything, we sometimes cut the guys back and say, 'go enjoy the weekend a bit', because some of the guys are extremely competitive and are just so passionate about this. Some of them are surprised they're still getting paid for it [laughs]. It's a great system and it's worked really well for us, but you need to have the right people, both in management and in the trenches doing the work – the modelling and programming and all that – to bring it all together. The right people just sort of come together because this is the sort of thing they'd love to do anyway. For a lot of these guys, the ability to work from home is like, 'whoa, fantastic!'"

**There are a couple of mods that have been built like that.**

"Well that's how we started, remember? We started by doing the mods for the *F1 2000* games. We made the *FIA GT* mods. We were just a handful of guys. We weren't even ten guys; we still had our day jobs and then at night when we got home we just hooked up on MSN and started chatting and coordinating. The big thing back then was that we released everything for free because we were 'just a mod team'. Then we won awards for Best Mod of the Year."

**So aspiring game development guys can do it, in this country, by just working hard.**

"And not giving up – just stay in there, persist at it. That's the main thing – not giving up. A lot of guys think 'I can get into this by being really good'. There are a lot of really good people out there who don't have a job in the industry and would love to get into the industry; they sometimes do eventually, but typically it's because



"It also won **awards for the 'greatest racing game that nobody knows of'.**"



they persevere. They get themselves visible; they deliver work and show that they're passionate about it. They're willing to work for either nothing (and typically have to, initially) or very little. But there is nothing that stops you, no matter what your geographical location is, as long as you're dedicated and willing to put in the effort. It took me twenty years to get into the industry. I started off teaching myself on the Commodore 64, typing in BASIC programs from the magazines. You'd sit there, typing and loading it onto a tape and then it wouldn't work and you'd have to start over and begin looking for that POKE or PEEK [laughs]. I started like that and then moved onto the Amiga where I had a little demo scene that I ran here in South Africa. We were initially called Rand Band and then Insignia. I did all the coding work for the team back then – you know, all that plasma stuff? We just kept at it and kept at it, moved on to modding to get wider visibility, and then twenty years later..."

**So, you're one of those good old-fashioned, hard-core 'been in the industry for ever' type of guys?**


"I just stuck at it, loved the gaming industry and after twenty years of that, I finally got the break. *GTR* gave us as a team a really strong foothold in the industry because with that we proved that not only were we passionate [but that we could do the work]. You need the skills and those skills come through practice. There

are very few people in this world who cannot attain the skills by persevering at it. Persevering, sticking at it and remaining passionate about it and being willing to put in all that time and all that effort and giving it away for free! *GTR* was certainly our big break because that got us into the industry. We made the whole game in ten months – which was unheard of. Then it was released and rated, and it got top ratings all over the world. Not only did it win awards for best racing game at the time, but (unfortunately) it also won awards for the 'greatest racing game that nobody knows of'. As far as 'hitting the big time' goes, this is certainly it. It took us a number of years to build up our technology and have our passion on display to somebody like EA. Patrick Sutherland explained recently in an interview that they looked at racing tech all over the world and they were most impressed by what we had to offer; in the way that we developed and the speed at which we do it and the technology that we had. We are extremely honoured, of course, to be entrusted with the biggest racing franchise in the world! We're extremely confident and we know what we're capable of. We're not arrogant, just plain confident – we know we can make a great game. We'll certainly do the *Need for Speed* franchise justice. We'll make sure that if it's the best selling game, it's also the best racing game [laughs]." **NAG**



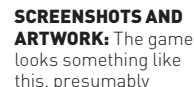


A green zombie character with a red bandana and a white shirt with a red heart and 'NY' on it. The character has a wide-eyed, open-mouthed expression.



## A quick guide to the NAG Reviews section

**BOX OUTS:** More good stuff. Just in a box.





## What We're Playing

Here are the top 20 games we're currently playing in the NAG office

#	GAME NAME
1	Call of Duty: World at War Zombie Verrückt
2	Quake III Arena
3	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare Multiplayer
4	Call of Duty: World at War Multiplayer
5	Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena
6	Afro Samurai
7	Battlefield Heroes
8	Battlefield: Bad Company
9	Burnout Paradise
10	Civilization Revolution
11	Fallout 3
12	Games with Standard Bank
13	Gears of War 2 Multiplayer
14	Grand Theft Auto IV
15	Magic: The Gathering
16	Mirror's Edge
17	Puzzle Quest: Galactrix
18	Team Fortress II
19	The Godfather II
20	X-Men Origins: Wolverine

## Distributors

Apex Interactive	[011] 796-5040
Asbis	[011] 848-7000
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450
Axiz	[011] 237-7000
Comstar	[011] 314-5812
Comstek	0860 600 557
Core Group	[087] 940-3000
Corex	[011] 655-8800
Cosmic Comics	[011] 476-9640
Drive Control Corporation	[011] 201-8927
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300
Esquire	0861 700 000
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Foxcomp	[011] 912-6300
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038
Incredible Connection	0860 011 700
Intel Corporation	[011] 806-4530
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Look & Listen	[011] 467-3717
Megarom	[011] 361-4800
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If your company isn't listed here, phone NAG on [011] 704-2679

## Web Scores

How do our scores compare to everyone else's? We've provided scores from Metacritic and Game Rankings for reference.

NAG // Metacritic // Game Rankings

### AFRO SAMURAI



360

75  
65  
70

### RESISTANCE: RETRIBUTION



PSP

87  
82  
83

### THE GODFATHER II



360

79  
65  
69

### X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE - UNCAGED EDITION



360

78  
74  
75

### C & C: RED ALERT 3: ULTIMATE EDITION



PC

68  
76  
NA

### EAT LEAD: THE RETURN OF MATT HAZARD



P53

59  
52  
54

### LODE RUNNER



XBLA

83  
76  
78

Games of the universe  
are all coming  
to one location...

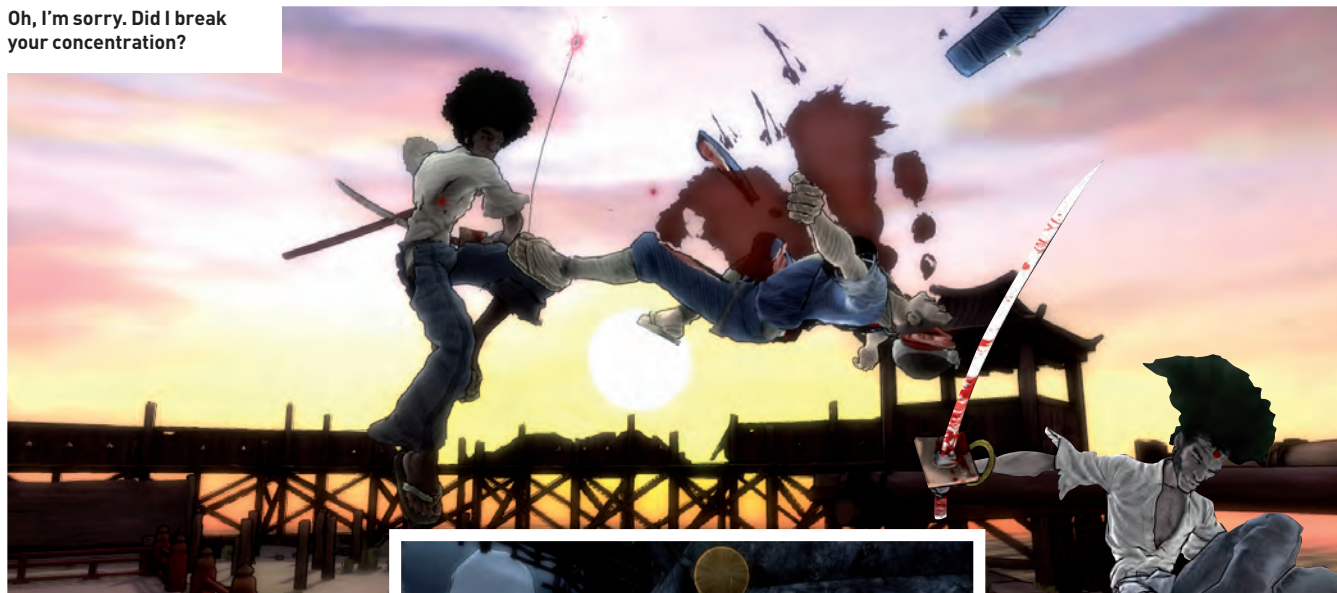


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Oh, I'm sorry. Did I break your concentration?



## Afro Samurai

Did I wake you, motherf\*\*\*er?

Genre→ Action

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**D**O YOU KNOW WHAT cool is? Samuel L. Jackson. I say "what" and not "who," because Samuel L. Jackson is an entity. He's 'cool-in-a-can'. If Samuel L. Jackson can make *Snakes on a Plane* watchable, he can make any game playable. By that token, surely a game featuring the voice of Samuel L. Jackson (shortening his name is forbidden), more blood than a leech farm could handle and visual style to challenge Tarantino's greatest works should be fantastic, shouldn't it? Sadly, this is not always the case, as *Afro Samurai* sets out to prove. No matter how cool your game is, it still has to have a good dose of actual game to keep its head above water.

The setting, as you'll no doubt figure out, is that of the anime (which is based on an older manga series) of the same title. The game runs alongside the show's story, ducking in and out of its narrative for a few bouts of combat in between cinematic sequences. The thing is, without having seen the anime (or, I assume, reading the manga), it's almost impossible to know what's actually going on in the story. It feels like the game's missing a good hour's worth of footage that should explain the transitions between levels, or who that group of bearded guys are, or why on Earth Afro would want to do any of the fluff between starting the game and claiming the Number One Headband. The manual does its fair share of explaining, introducing a few characters and the setting established in the show, but it simply doesn't do enough to make up for



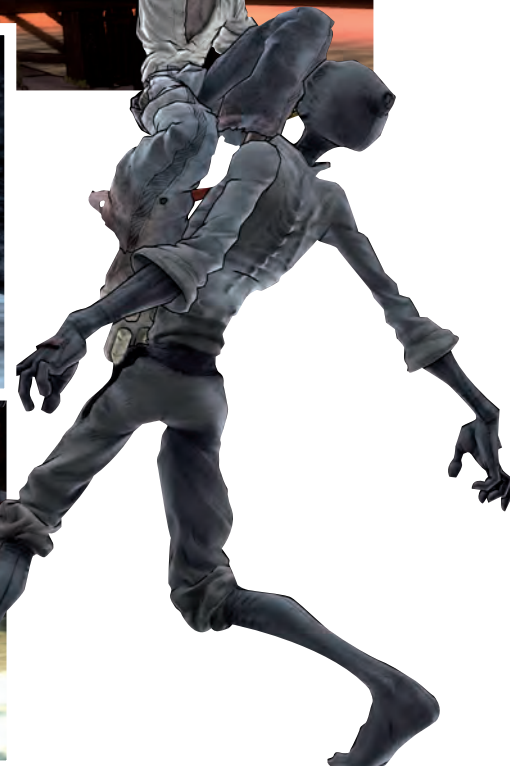
the complete lack of logic you'd expect stringing things together.

Thankfully, if you enjoy beat-'em-ups and can look past the lack of character motivation (heck, many of us spent the best part of the early nineties doing this quite happily), you'll discover an action game that boasts a complex combat system, incredibly stylish visuals and a rich, varied soundtrack.

As the young, out-of-place samurai, Afro, players will journey to a variety of gorgeously detailed scenes. Quaint Japanese towns, training academies, underground volcanoes and even the Ark (at least, we think it's *the* Ark) will lie before you and the onslaught of foes just dying to keep your blade dripping with blood.

Combat is handled with a mix of two attack types, kicks, jumps and parries.

While button mashing certainly has its place here, and will likely get you through the first few chapters with ease, the real beauty of this system lies in its flexibility. Players are free to mash to their hearts' content, but the speed at which they dispatch their foes and the ease with which they defeat the (sometimes rather challenging) bosses will be determined by their use of more advanced combinations and manoeuvres. What this boils down to is having the ability to play the game exactly how you want – making the combat system only as complex as you desire. Should you need the depth, it's there in bucket loads. This complexity, you'll soon find, is quite necessary to keep the game interesting, as Afro's enemies literally pour down in waves. I have a painfully distinct memory of fighting five waves of separate attackers at one







And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers



Get these mutha f\*%\$\*!g ninjas out of my mutha f\*%\$\*!g way!



stage, only to be followed by four identical waves of 'big guys with big swords' whose deaths served only to lower the invisible barrier around the arena so I could drop a switch. Monster boxes, repeated boss opponents and all manner of done-to-death beat-'em-up tricks make an appearance here. While they're certainly frustrating (especially when separated by cut-scenes that can't be skipped) in their repetition, they have this uncanny knack of reminding one of games like *Golden Axe* – something that might appeal to the old-school crowd.

When Afro's not 'amputating' Japanese peasants in straw hats, he'll spend his spare time zipping around the levels in search of his next challenge. Unfortunately, Afro should have spent a little more time at the *Prince of Persia* School of Awesome Level Navigation and a little less time working on perfecting the infinite cigarette. Movement through the levels is handled in a mostly 'jump here, fight these guys, now jump over here' fashion, interspersed with tacked-on wall runs and similar gymnastic feats and a couple of levers to flip or ropes to cut. These parts of the level are so false and so poorly integrated into the regular game

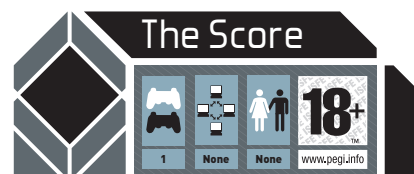
dynamic that they're better off just staying at home, although they do at least provide a brief reprieve from simply running to your next slaughterhouse.

The HUD – or lack thereof – needs some special mention here. Plenty of games have shown us their approach to an HUD-free system, but *Afro Samurai* performs this task particularly well. Whenever an enemy is slain, a small pendant dangling from Afro's sword glows red. Regular twinkles indicate that Afro is ready to unleash his Focus Power to dive into bullet time-like slow motion to perform devastating attacks and take evasive action. Charging up the pendant can also be performed by unleashing extensive combinations (the longer the combination, the more blood splatters on the screen).

It's tough to discredit a game that is, at its heart, entertaining. The combat is fast and flexible, the visuals ooze style, and Samuel L. Jackson's voice combined with Wu Tang Clan member RZA's soundtrack come together to deliver a game that is slick enough to slide up hills and is genuinely fun to play, but frustrating. You'll find yourself repeating sections a number of times, annoyed by cut-scenes

you can't skip and, if you've not watched the anime show, completely and utterly confused as to what exactly is going on. In the end, it doesn't really matter. *Afro Samurai* is fun to play for the 15-odd hours of game time, but will probably be long forgotten by the time the next mindless beat-'em-up comes along. It's a pity, really, because it brings some interesting mechanics to the table and does so with real class. If only there was more underlying substance.

**NAG**  
**Geoff Burrows**



Plus	Minus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Great combat system</li> <li>+ Looks amazing</li> <li>+ Samuel L. Jackson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Repetitive</li> <li>- Unoriginal</li> <li>- Confusing</li> </ul>

**Bottom Line**  
Definitely one for the fans, but a big 'maybe' for everyone else. If you have a weekend to kill, this game should be perfect.

AVAILABLE AT  
**Look & Listen**  
For the Fans







# The Godfather II

Making offers no one can refuse

Genre→ Action/Strategy

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**WHEN MICHAEL CORLEONE'S TRUSTED** Don of New York City is killed, as the Mafia organisation attempts to flee from the New Year's Revolution in Cuba (in 1958), he appoints a new Don to oversee the massive city. His name is Dominic, and the player controls him. This marks the first break from the first *The Godfather* videogame: instead of starting at the bottom, the player more or less starts as high as he is going to go for the whole game. However, as the Don of New York – and later Florida and Cuba – the player has more than enough to keep him busy. He has to 'build up' a family of 'made men', take over businesses, improve his own character (as well as those of the men who work for him), and take on five opposing Mafia families.

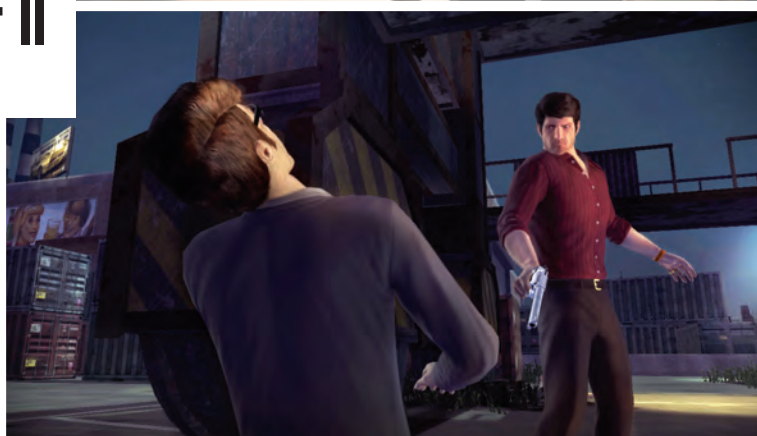
Where the previous game had depth in terms of the plot, this title is broader, giving the player much more freedom. In fact, it only borrows a few elements from the film's plot (it is based on the second film in Francis Ford Coppola's series) and makes rather wide deviations from the main story for most of the game. This will probably get *Godfather* purists in a twist, but if one considers that this is an alternate take on the story (much like the *X-Men* movies), it becomes a minor problem.

A big addition to the game comes in the form of a management screen called The Don's View. In this mode, the player gets a quick overview of business interests in the various locations, and can manage guards, 'made men' and a few other functions. The management required by the game is hardly rocket science. It comes down to making sure that places 'have' sufficient

muscle to keep rivals from taking them, and making sure that the books balance at the end of each day. It's not complex stuff, but it is a welcome addition to the game, and gives the player an added sense of being in control of a crime family.

Businesses form the core of the game, because they provide the player with income and other advantages. They are divided into two categories: crime rings and rackets. Crime rings are made up of several individual businesses, and fall into socially unacceptable categories like prostitution, drug smuggling and gunrunning. Controlling all the businesses in a crime ring will provide the player with advantages that include extended ammunition capacity, armoured cars and other handy abilities. Rackets, on the other hand, are fronts that allow a player to launder the money earned from crime rings. While crime rings bring in the most income, rackets modify that income (with a percentage modifier) and prove to be very valuable because of that.

Once the player controls an interest, it needs to be guarded. Guards can be hired via The Don's View, and the player will have to balance their numbers carefully in the early stages of the game. 'Made men' can



Hey, where's all the furniture?



also be sent to guard interests, or defend them should a rival attack occur. They can even be sent to sabotage rival interests, which will deny those rivals the use of crime-ring bonuses for a limited time.

The bulk of the game is made up of taking over businesses and doing battle with rival families. This is a violent, often brutal activity, with Dominic capable of leading three additional 'made men' into a mob war. The brutality is high, which, when combined with the thoroughly foul language and partial nudity, means that this isn't one for the kids. Businesses are taken over by killing all the rival men





guarding them, and then roughing up the owner until he (or she – this game is not sexist!) gives in and hands control over.

Taking out rival families is a rare and entertaining treat within the game. This activity invariably leads to massive gun battles, although the 'planning' stages (which involve assassinating the families of 'made men', should the player choose to do so) are also enjoyable. The free-roaming basis of the game affords the player massive amounts of freedom, without pushing the dynamic towards the plot-driving missions too much.

The overall dynamic is fun, although the game gets fairly repetitive at times. Still, in smaller doses, the action is intense and addictive, with a large arsenal of upgradeable weapons, special executions and hand-to-hand styles available to the player. Once the single-player action is sorted, the player can take to online multiplayer gaming, too.

*The Godfather II* is great fun, but it is not without its problems. The graphics vary from being excellent in terms of special effects, to feeling dated when it



comes to character modelling. The cities are rather small, and the driving required to get from A to B is plain nasty. (Narrow roads, stupid pedestrians, dodgy vehicle controls... worse than driving in Cape Town.) A number of in-game bugs crop up as well. They are small, annoying bugs, though – not the kind that ruin a game. Some of the voice acting is equally dodgy, although there are very few examples of this problem.

For the most part, players should enjoy this free-roaming action title, as long as they are willing to forgive its quirks. **NAG**

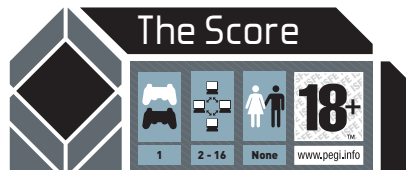
Walt Pretorius

**Automatic weapons, huge explosions and big, ugly American cars: it's an offer you can't refuse.**

## Who's who

There are several recognisable faces in this game, despite the fact that the plot has taken a knock or two, thanks to some creative licence. The most familiar name (if not face) is Michael Corleone (played by Al Pacino in the film), of course, who is the son of the original Godfather, Don Vito Corleone. Other characters lifted from the 1974 film include Tom Hagen (Robert Duvall), Fredo Corleone (John Cazale), Hyman Roth (Lee Strasberg), Frankie Pentangeli (Michael V. Gazzo) and Senator Pat Geary (G. D. Spradlin). The characters are mostly visually recognisable, and their places in the plot are (for the most part) correct. However, despite this list of familiar characters, the purist might be upset by the wide deviations made from the original plot by the game developers.

## The Score



### Plus

- + Great freedom
- + Lots of action
- + Awesome executions

### Minus

- A few bugs
- Nasty driving
- Small cities

### Bottom Line

*The Godfather II* is a fun game for those who enjoy a 'life of crime', despite a few bugs.

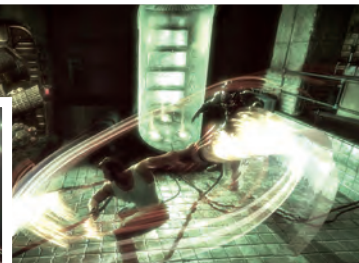
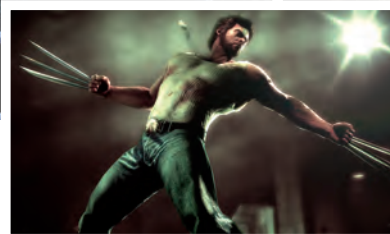
AVAILABLE AT  
**Look & Listen**  
For the Fans







This is why you shouldn't interrupt Wolverine in the middle of a joke



# X-Men Origins: Wolverine

Snikity Snikt!

Genre→ First-Person Shooter

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY that one has the pleasure of experiencing a good movie-to-game adaptation. Where most games based on movies try to recreate "awesome scene X" or spend hours hung up on "fantastic dialogues A through F," *Wolverine* just does whatever it feels like doing. While that works for most of the game, it does leave you decidedly confused, possibly irritated and often completely without understanding as to why exactly you're doing whatever it is that you're doing.

First things first. If you've seen the film and loved the nuances and subtle hints, carefully crafted storyline and engaging characters (read this with as much or as little sarcasm as necessary), jump into a time machine and go back a year. Forget that you ever laid eyes on the pretty moving pictures, and imagine that this game stands on its own – because it does. Got it? The storyline in *Wolverine* takes the key elements from the film, such as the beginning and end, mixed up with a few bits in the middle like "Wolverine meets Gambit" and breaks them completely. It chucks them into new scenes with a new chronological order and adds a large dose of flashback (about 40% of the game) into Team X's African excursion.

It's important to realise just how different the game is from the film so that you can pay attention to the good part of this equation: *Wolverine*, like the comic that came before it, is violent – extremely violent. The big W claws and stabs his way through enough enemies to put Kratos to shame, and does so with a colourful mix



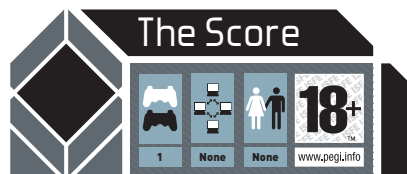
of decapitations, detached limbs and an awesome unstoppable sense (courtesy of the very slick regeneration system) that keeps you coming back for more. The game is loads of fun to play and equally entertaining to watch. As Wolverine jumps from scene to scene – each created in masterful detail and making full use of the Unreal Engine 3 – you'll be treated to a variety of enemies just itching to get their slice of Adamantium pie.

When Wolverine isn't leaping on to stealth ninjas with shotguns and four-armed stone statues, he'll spend his time in the highly un-Wolffy business of solving minor puzzles by turning cranks, hopping between ropes and diving through timed gates on the other side of a floor laden with spike traps. As you progress through the game it actually becomes more like a proper combat platformer than a simple beat-'em-up. Fighting is handled with a combination of jumps and attacks, with a few fury powers available to spice things up. It's a pleasantly complex combat system that gives you loads of ways to skin any particular cat, but for the most part, you'll find your ideal method and stick to it throughout the game. Boss fights vary between perfecting the art of the timed leap and quick-time events, with the rest handled by persistent button

mashing and hammering away at your opponent until he stops blocking.

Whether or not you enjoy *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* will depend largely on how important storylines are to you. Personally, I recommend that you get a recap of the film's story from a friend with ADD, flip through the game's cut-scenes to get a broad understanding of who needs to be killed next, and spend the best part of the 15 hours of game time finding new ways to slice through the locals. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



Plus

+ Looks great  
+ Entertaining combat  
+ Puzzles are decent

Minus

- Story is broken  
- A bit repetitive

Bottom Line

Plenty of fun in its own right, but messes too much with the already messy story of the film.

AVAILABLE AT  
Look Listen  
For the Fans





# WIN

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Yes, sometimes you don't pick on things your own size



## Resistance: Retribution

Join the fight to free a conquered Europe

Genre→ Action

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 **PSP** DS

**T**HOUGH THIS MAY DISPEL any suspense regarding the matter, let me start by saying that this is quite simply the best PSP game I have played to date! (In any case, you've probably already looked at the score box.) It even tops, in my opinion, *Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow*, which I regard very highly indeed! The game returns to the alternate-reality 1951 sci-fi setting of previous *Resistance* games, with Europe having been almost completely subjugated by the Chimera alien invasion. Apparently, the Chimera is running out of "resources" (mostly human beings!) to convert into Chimera, so the conversion plants are being dismantled. And yet, somehow, Chimera's grip on the planet is only tightening... The player assumes the role of a British former officer who is officially disgraced, though a hero in the eyes of many of the rank and file.

The game is presented in third-person 3D, interspersed with video cut-scenes, voice-overs, and briefing screens to advance the storyline, which is quite eventful, if not exceptionally deep or convoluted. Non-player characters interact with the player in various ways – as plot elements, or as allies in combat. These NPCs have been developed with defined personalities, and some like and respect the protagonist, while others may be quite antagonistic. In game, the player gradually gains access to an arsenal of weapons, and ammunition is scattered around. While initially it is plentiful, it pays to learn to be economical, as later on the going gets tougher. Aiming is done by means



of the buttons on the right, assisted by an optional aim-assist function (it is recommended that you leave this on – at least on your first time through the game!). A nice touch is the fact that the turning and aiming sensitivity can be adjusted. The game provides a cover system, whereby the protagonist will hide behind a doorjamb or duck behind low cover, popping out or up in order to fire at enemies. Stages end in the traditional manner: with boss fights. Whether normal progress through the levels or boss fights, play is somewhat tactical. It is sometimes necessary to quickly decide on an efficient way to handle a situation, and methodical play is more effective than undisciplined running and gunning.

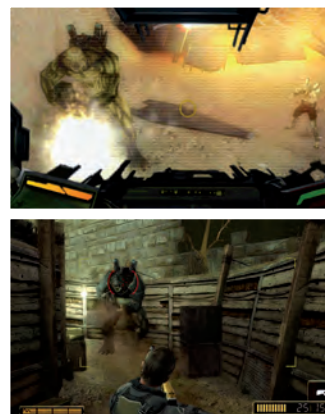
As you play, you get to unlock various items and skills. There are also two locked play modes, which can only be accessed by connecting the PSP to a PS3. These are Plus Mode, which ups the difficulty, removes aim-assist, but allows the use of the PS3's wireless controller; and Infected Mode, which sees the player assume the role of a Chimera-infected protagonist, who has some special abilities (along with new content), but suffers social disabilities due to his condition. The latter mode

can still be played once the PSP has been disconnected from the PS3.

The graphics are great (though, at least on the original PSP model, still suffer from the unintended motion blur evident during fast-paced sequences), and the sound is excellent (in terms of sound effects, voice-overs and voice acting, and the soundtrack). The action is smooth and, once you get the hang of it, easy to control (though, faster running wouldn't be amiss, especially in boss fights). Overall, this is a most enjoyable experience.

**NAG**

Alex Jelagin



Plus

+ Good graphics  
+ Good story  
+ Solid play dynamic

Minus

- Character can't run

Bottom Line

If you have a PSP and you are over 16, you HAVE to try this one! Great tactical fun with good graphics, sound, story, and pace.

AVAILABLE AT  
Look Listen  
For the Fans

(87)





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9/10 **X360**

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# Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard

(No, he never really left in the first place)

Genre→ Action

PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

## INTENDED AS A TONGUE-FIRMLY-IN-CHEEK

'send-up' of video gaming as a whole, Vicious Cycle's *Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard* centres on a washed-up videogame character who's now well out of his heyday. Despite once being the star of many blockbuster releases, archetypal bald-headed, space-grunt Matt Hazard hasn't seen anything more prestigious than a kart-racer endorsement in the last six years, and hopes to make a grand comeback with his latest game. Matt soon learns, however, that he was intended to be killed off in the first level of his new game, and replaced with a brainless Schwarzenegger clone, destined to become the next big name in action gaming. Of course, Matt isn't going to stand by idly in the face of such injustice, and so begins his crusade against the tyranny of the videogame developers, in a self-referential romp that pokes fun at just about all of video gaming's best-known clichés.

*Eat Lead* is a third-person cover-based shooter, which sees Matt taking on a selection of stereotypical enemies (ranging from two-dimensional fascist troops to battle-hungry space marines) in a variety of stereotypical settings (including numerous warehouses, as well as a ship and an office building). The core dynamic in *Eat Lead* isn't all that different from that found in other cover-based shooters (such as *Gears of War*): the most noticeable difference is that this game just feels altogether less polished than its contemporaries. Matt's repertoire of moves includes the genre's usual ducking, rolling and



popping out from cover, as well as blind-firing and rudimentary melee attacks. One addition to the genre is the "Point to Cover" concept, which allows you to move using different objects as cover simply by selecting them and tapping a button. It's a useful addition amidst what is otherwise a very ordinary shooter.

The true tragedy of *Eat Lead*, however, is that its strongest point also soon becomes its most critical weakness. Although the game takes every opportunity to sharply ridicule video gaming clichés, it does so only by itself succumbing to them. For example, Matt might openly ridicule the concept of having to defeat a boss character in three different forms, all the while fending off an infinite army of respawning underlings, but that's exactly the sort of thing *Eat Lead* forces you to do. It's the same problem that faced *The Simpsons Game* – it's all very well pointing out what's wrong with video gaming, but developers need to figure out how to include the satire without committing the same fouls themselves.

As it stands, *Eat Lead* – while being playable – soon becomes a tedious experience, and one that too often relies



on its humour to compensate for its lacklustre play experience. To its credit, the game is often amusing, and having the voice-acting talents of Will Arnett and Neil Patrick Harris on board to voice Matt Hazard and the game's ultimate villain respectively is certainly a big selling point. It's just unfortunate that *Eat Lead* isn't as successful at being a competent action title as it is at taking jabs at the videogame industry. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

The Score

1

None

None

16+

Plus  
+ Humorous  
+ Voice-acting talent

Minus  
- Tedious  
- Flawed

## Bottom Line

While managing to be an incisive parody of video gaming's most pervasive clichés, *Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard* is tedious to play.

AVAILABLE AT  
Look Listen  
For the Fans

59





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# Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3: Ultimate Edition

Waging war again... again...

Genre→ Real-time Strategy

PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

**T**HERE IS NO WAY around it. *Halo Wars* happened, and now every single real-time strategy title released for consoles will be compared to that game. It's just the way things are. The comparisons aren't necessarily fair, either, because *Halo Wars* was developed specifically for console gaming, while most other RTS titles are still made for PC first, with console releases being mere afterthoughts. But there's no avoiding it - so here goes...

*Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3* didn't receive the best reviews when it was initially released for PC, with many complaining that the graphics were too stylised and that the game dynamic lacked the flair and depth of previous games in the *Red Alert* series. However, it is still far more complex than the much simpler, more streamlined *Halo Wars*. That said, it bears mentioning that *Red Alert 3* has ended up being the most console-friendly game in the entire *Command & Conquer* stable.

If you have played the PC version, there are no real surprises here - at least not in terms of plot and campaigns. A number of additions have been made to the PlayStation 3 version, including a new soundtrack, new maps and a number of exclusive features (including a 'Girls of Command & Conquer' behind-the-scenes look.) But the factions are the same, the units are the same and the missions are the same.

The pace is a little different, though: it's easier playing this kind of game with a mouse than a PS3 controller, after all. Things haven't been slowed down much, but they certainly are less quick than the



PC version. Then again, they are quicker than the average RTS on a console. This is largely because the developers took a few leaves out of the *Halo Wars* book.

All menus in the game make use of a context-sensitive radial system, which allows the player fairly easy access to whatever it is they are trying to build or research. However, there are many units to choose from, and the technology tree is still a little longer than is comfortable. The result is that the player will need to dig down through these menus at times, in order to find exactly what it is they're after.

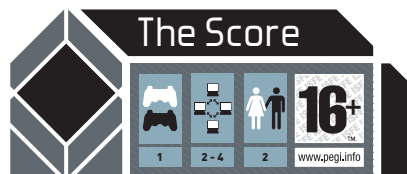
The controls are nice and simple, with easy unit selection (of a particular type on screen) and fairly effective 'all-unit' selection (although this only applies to the units currently visible, which can lead to a few problems.) A menu can also be used to select all units of the same type (infantry, armour, air, and so on.) This is a slower method, though, and only really works well during the planning and staging phases of any particular strategy.

In short, *Red Alert 3* for the PlayStation 3 takes a number of steps in the right direction, but still has a way to go before it equals the sleek efficiency of *Halo Wars*. The game is still a little too complex,



with a few too many options and a little too much freedom in terms of base construction. It has picked up speed, but it isn't a console RTS rocket just yet.

**NAG**  
Walt Pretorius



Plus

+ Improved dynamics  
+ Excellent looks

Minus

- Still a bit slow  
- Too much to do

Bottom Line

It's a step in the right direction, but there is still a way to go before EA releases a console RTS masterpiece.

AVAILABLE AT  
Look & Listen  
For the Fans

68



## Lode Runner

Run around, grab stuff, don't die

Genre → Platform Action

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**O**KAY, SO I MISSED the original game, published in 1983 by Brøderbund. I was only just barely alive back then, and too busy negotiating the treacherous byways of infant neurognosis and Stickle Brick stacking theory. I do remember playing a demo of Sierra's *Lode Runner: The Legend Returns* sometime around 1995, however, and my fragile juvenile brain being twisted up into all sorts of exotic new directions. Now, to celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary [26 years later], those nice people over at XBLA HQ have resurrected Douglas E. Smith's iconic platform puzzler with a blowout of blockbuster proportions.

It's simple enough at a quick glance: you rush a little guy around a multi-tiered environment, grabbing bits of gold while avoiding the Mad Monks / Abominable Snowmen / Robots out to stop your shameless desecration of their holy stuff (or whatever) with their totally unfair one-touch kill. You can scramble up and down ladders and dangle across ropes



and chains and whatnot, but in exchange for all this superhero dauntlessness, you must dispense with that one otherwise indispensable platform manoeuvre – you can't jump. Presumably by way of compensation or something, however, you've got this nifty little hand cannon to blast away designated blocks, and temporarily trap pursuers. The rest of it mostly involves plotting the quickest, safest route between you, the bits of gold, and the door that's going to magically appear when you're done looting the place.

This version is every bit as enthralling as that 1995 demo, and even more so because it's the full game that I never managed to actually find for sale. That's 200+ levels, mind you, including the

career and (brilliant) puzzle stages, as well as co-op play and a fully featured level editor. Yes, this is the mother lode. Yes, I actually said it.

**NAG**  
Tarryn van der Byl

**Packing more than 200 levels, Lode Runner offers serious value for money**

### The Score



AVAILABLE AT  
**Look & Listen**  
FootieFans

### Bottom Line

Twenty-six years old, and still hot.



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# Call of Duty

**A**FTER SIGNING UP FOR World War II sometime in 1942, Private Joey Martin is sent to Camp Toccoa in Georgia, where he learns how to read signs, consult a compass, switch weapons, and other hardcore soldier stuff for about ten minutes or so. Then he's chucked out of a biplane somewhere over Sainte-Mère-Église with a .30 M1A1 carbine rifle and the rest of Baker Company's 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, with orders to win the war. Then they do. It's more or less exactly what happened in real life.

In fact, it was that very attention to the gritty reality of warfare that promoted then-rookie developer Infinity Ward's debut title, *Call of Duty*, a rank above its WWII shooter contemporaries, *Medal of Honor* and *Battlefield 1942*.

Eschewing traditional (well, unrealistic) lone-wolf, big-hero FPS tactics, the game introduced a squad-styled game dynamic, supporting the player with a rowdy mob of AI comrades throughout most of the campaign. You still had to slog it through the mud and mines of Germany's rural offensive, but you did it with your battle buddies being churned into *bratwurst* at your back - just like the real thing (if they'd only learnt to bunny-hop like you). And just when you thought the game couldn't possibly be any more daring, it threw in concurrent campaigns where you played as British and Soviet soldiers, doing their own bit for the war effort in major Allied operations through Stalingrad, Warsaw, and Berlin. **NAG**

## United offensive

*Call of Duty* was so ridiculously successful on PC that Activision quickly scrambled to push the franchise out into the trenches of console warfare. Just about a year after the original PC release, a new version of the game, developed by Spark Unlimited, was enlisted for Xbox, PS2, and GameCube.

Dubbed *Finest Hour*, this game presented campaigns set alongside the events of its PC predecessor, but featured its own characters and storyline. Similarly (and just a bit confusingly), this console version got its own sequel on Xbox and PS2 a year later, *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One* (developed by Treyarch), which wasn't the same as the PC and Xbox 360 game, *Call of Duty 2* (developed by Infinity Ward), released at the same time. It's a sentence that makes sense if you read it over a few times. This whacky numbering system came back in line with [the only] *Call of Duty 3* in late 2006, although it hung onto some vestiges of eccentricity by being console exclusive, developed by Treyarch, and featuring Canada as a playable country (ha, ha, Canada).



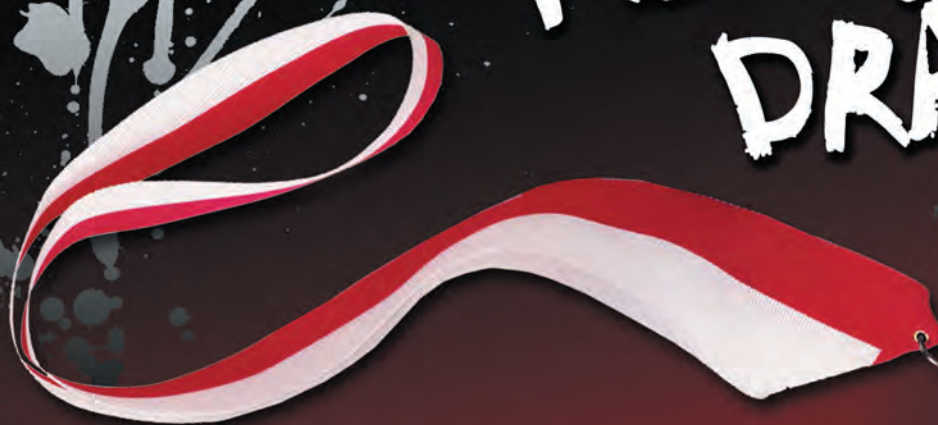
## Apparently just generally offensive

Shortly after the game's release, Activision introduced a (front) line of action figures in cooperation with Plan-B Toys. The company later came under heavy fire for its Nazi SS *Totenkopf* figurine, and grudgingly

discontinued the model amid controversy. "That division was involved in some terrible things but wasn't everyone during World War Two? It's just history," reads a company statement. Besides, it was a cool figurine.



# Feel the DRAMA



## COMING SOON

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## HD on a phone

**WE DON'T USUALLY COVER** unreleased phones in the hardware section despite having seen some brilliant phones before, both from a hardware and software point of view. However, something caught our attention and yes, it's a phone, but it would not be inaccurate to say that is the most mundane of its features. What Samsung has produced with the OMNIA HD is nothing short of incredible.

Some have called it the iPhone killer; however such a comparison we feel is meaningless, as these two phones are worlds apart. In fact all phones against the HD are worlds apart. Not only because of the number of features Samsung has packed into the phone, but it's in how it all comes together. Powered by the proven and highly customisable Symbian S60 OS, the Samsung OMNIA HD has an incredible amount of applications ready for it because of the choice of operating system, but more than that the most impressive feature of the phone will be in its presentation.

In 2004 already NVIDIA and Samsung began working together with the GoForce 2100-powered SCH-M500 phone. Since then Samsung has been using NVIDIA-powered platforms in a number of their phones including the P910 and P940 a few years ago. All those phones made use of the power available in the GPUs from the inventor of the GPU.

All the previous projects, however, were add-on chips and not a complete platform like what Samsung have now with the OMNIA HD, which we suspect is based on the NVIDIA TEGRA APX platform. If you are not familiar with the Tegra platform, its first showing was in 2008 with NVIDIA's APX2500 phone, which caused quite a stir when it was shown in Germany at Cebit as a mobile platform.

The phone was bigger than what the OMNIA HD is right now, however the features were pretty

much what we have today. And yes, the phone will still be able to play *Quake*. The phone featured HSDPA 7.2Mbps and HSUPA 5.76Mbps, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, a claimed 10 hours of video playback, HDMI output for full 720p HD Video playback, HD Video recording (720p), 8MP Camera, and support for surround sound audio. All of these features made it to the OMNIA HD; however it could be that the OMNIA HD is powered by a newer platform hence it being smaller than the initial model NVIDIA was showing. Right now as it stands the features read the same, but a few things have changed. Battery life is said to be an incredible 13 hours of talk time over the 10 hours on the NVIDIA model and no, it is not a printing error – 13 hours and 30 minutes is the stipulated talk time. Not only that, the OMNIA HD features an Active Matrix OLED display and, together with the underlying hardware, displays full 24-bit colour (16.7 million colours), which makes every other phone on the market pale on comparison.

The original platform that NVIDIA showed off was powered by the ARM11 750MHz processor, but the HD, being newer, is powered by the newer ARM Cortex A8, 600MHz processor. We asked NVIDIA for clarification about the hardware specifics but as per their policy, they could not comment on any design prior to the product being officially launched.

All technicalities aside, it seems the OMNIA HD is the phone that will set the new standard for mobile phones. Just its user interface alone is something to marvel at and more powerful than anything else out there. With HD capabilities, any competitor to this phone will have to come up with something even more amazing, and we must admit it's going to be pretty hard to beat the Samsung OMNIA HD. It just may be the best phone ever made.

## Foxconn A7DA-S 3.0 and A7DA 3.0

Part of Foxconn's Performance Series of motherboards, the socket AM3 A7DA-S 3.0 and A7DA 3.0 feature enhanced connectivity and entertainment capabilities, backed up by high-performance features and components. Based on the AMD 790GX and the SB750 Southbridge chipset with an advanced DirectX 10 graphics engine with AMD UVD technology, these new MOBOs from Foxconn support Blu-Ray content, offloading power- and processor-intensive video decoding from the CPU to the graphics core (an on-board ATI Radeon HD 3300). Utilising AMD's Performance Cache, the A7DA-S 3.0 and A7DA 3.0 offer superb graphics performance. With 128MB Performance Cache integrated on the motherboard, users "... can experience an additional 3D graphics performance boost of up to 28%." The new CPU socket supports the latest AMD Phenom II processors with HT 3.0 technology, and AMD's OverDrive technology allows you to push the CPU to its limits. The A7DA-S 3.0 and A7DA 3.0 support the latest dual-channel 1,333MHz DDR3, with a total of 8GB supported across four DIMM slots. Expansion ports include two PCI-E 16x slots, two PCI-E 1x slots, and two PCI slots.



## Microsoft SideWinder X3

Look. It's an eight-button gaming mouse for fans of SideWinder products! The X3 Mouse has five programmable main buttons that are customisable to gamers' preferences and tested for extreme gaming, with the main button life rated to 10 million clicks. Other features include a 2,000 dots-per-inch (dpi) laser-tracking engine with on-the-fly dpi switching between high, medium and low sensitivity.

## NAG Awards

**DREAM MACHINE:** We have a dream. That only the best hardware gets this hot chick, waving her derriere in the air like she just don't care.

**HARDWARE:** Ever wonder why it's called hardware? If something has this award, then someone got hard for the ware.



## Hardware Scoring System

Our hardware scoring system is based on the reviewer's expert opinion. The scale is from 1 to 5 with no fractional values. Each number has a specific meaning, described below. Most products will score 3 or 4, with the occasional 5 or 2, and almost never 1. Note that a high price alone can never lower a score below 3.

- 5 The stuff of Legends.** Buy it while you can, we already have.
- 4 A good deal;** worth it if you're shopping for one.
- 3 What you'd expect,** no problems. You might want to wait for a sale.
- 2 This has some issues.** You should shop around for something else.
- 1 The stuff of Nightmares.** You'll be sorry you got one, even for free.



## Lian Li ARMORSUIT Series PC-P50R Gaming Mid-tower Chassis

**L**IAN LI HAS ANNOUNCED the launch of its latest mid-tower gaming chassis, the ARMORSUIT Series PC-P50R. It features red anodised components and an AMD logo, which will appeal to gamers. Setting up a high-end system in an ARMORSUIT chassis should be a very straightforward experience, as the chassis features a completely tool-less system setup. To make things even more 'user friendly', Lian Li's new ARMORSUIT chassis also features a tool-less PSU securing bracket for the quick installation of a PSU in the system. Other features include eight PCI expansion slots for 3-Way SLI or CrossFireX configurations, rubberised anti-vibration HDD brackets in a removable cage, and multimedia I/O ports (two USB 2.0 and HD+AC97 Audio) at the top of the chassis. The ARMORSUIT PC-P50R is compatible with ATX and microATX MOBOS, and features nine 5.25-inch ODD bays. The removable HDD bracket has three 3.5-inch



bays for hard drives.

Cooling is taken care of by an integrated 120mm fan at the front of the chassis, two 140mm dual-vibration fans mounted at the top of the case and a rear-mounted 120mm extraction fan.



## LOGITECH LAUNCHES WIRELESS GUITAR CONTROLLER

The Logitech Wireless Guitar Controller has just been announced for PS3 and PS2. Sporting a wood neck and body, rosewood fingerboard and metal frets, the black guitar has been officially licensed by Activision for the Guitar Hero franchise. For reduced button noise, Logitech uses rubber dome technology on the fret board controls, and also incorporates a touch-sensitive slider on the neck of the guitar.

# #5.50

There is a new system software update for the PSP (PlayStation Portable). The v5.50 upgrade allows you to view PlayStation Network's Information Board on the PSP system's XMB (XrossMediaBar) interface on your screen (as long as you are Wi-Fi connected).

## A note on pricing

You may notice that we have removed all the pricing information from our Dream Machine products as well as all of our hardware reviews. With the current daily fluctuations in exchange rates it is becoming difficult to supply you with up-to-date and accurate prices on hardware. The time lapse between when we compile the information and when you get to read it means that the pricing has usually changed, and we either receive irate e-mails from our readers complaining about the pricing being higher than what we published, or we receive complaints from the suppliers saying that our pricing is wrong. Jump Shopping ([www.jump.co.za](http://www.jump.co.za)) is South Africa's leading Shopping Comparison Search Engine. They list and group products from over 100 local online stores, so you can compare prices quickly and with ease. We recommend that you use this comparative resource, as this is definitely one of those instances where online will be more accurate than print in terms of actual pricing on the day.

## Snippets

MSI has added a turbo button to the GX623 and GX633 laptops, which will ramp up the speed of the CPU when the laptop is connected to mains power.

Sumitomo and Panasonic will be collaborating on a 40-inch OEL (organic electroluminescent) panel due for release by 2010. The TV will only consume 40 watts, be 3 millimetres thick, and 20 times brighter than plasma-based TVs.

Intel's new slogan, "Sponsors of Tomorrow" is intended to refocus consumers on the fact that Intel is an innovator in technology.

Windows 7 Release Candidate (RC) can now be downloaded for free and will only expire on 1 June 2010.

AMD has combined its microprocessor and graphics chips business units into a single department. The next generation of innovation in the computing industry will be grounded in the fusion of microprocessor and graphics technologies.

ASUS and DTS have partnered to bring to market enthusiast and mainstream retail motherboards featuring DTS Surround Sensation UltraPC.

## Hardware Q & A

**FROM:** Will Bill

**SUBJECT:** LCD Screens Help!!!

**"RECENTLY I'VE BEEN CHECKING** out all the variety LCD Screens that's available on the market today, and finally I've decided on two finalists. The Samsung Syncmaster 2033SWN LCD and the Samsung Syncmaster T190 LCD. It's been giving me headache's so I've decided on a 2nd opinion. As far as I can see these are 2 excellent screens but I'm worried about screen quality. I don't know LCD screens that well so that's why I'm asking you, so which one would you prefer?

And if you have the time, I'm looking for a CPU Fan for the Phenom X3 9650. I've looked on websites but the collection is so huge, I don't know which is good and which are bad. It would be very appreciated."

**Neo:** *I would personally take the Syncmaster 2033SWN LCD, and as for the CPU cooler I would buy a Zalman CNPS9500 or anything in the CNPS range. They are all above average CPU coolers.*



**FROM:** Michael

**SUBJECT:** AMD and NVidia?

**"UNTIL TODAY I THOUGHT** that NVidia and AMD worked together, but just now when I was reading the May issue of NAG, it surprised me to know that AMD and ATI is the true twins. Now as you now I'm buying the AMD Phenom X3 9650 (although I'm considering the Phenom II), but I just wanted to know if I should buy the NVidia 9600GT or the 295GTX if it's going to have a major affect on performance? Obviously I want the NVidia for their excellent PhysX system. Or should I go with ATI?

You're help would be much appreciated.  
Loyal NAG Fan"

**Neo:** *The CPU would be underpowered to get the most out of the GTX295, and a 9600GT is not a worthwhile investment right now. Rather buy a single GeForce GTX275.*

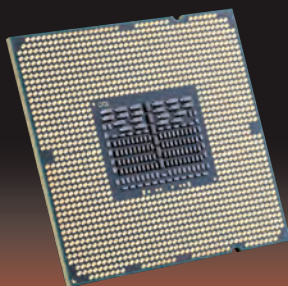
**To have your hardware questions answered, write to [lauren.dasneves@tidemedia.co.za](mailto:lauren.dasneves@tidemedia.co.za), and we might print your question in the magazine.**





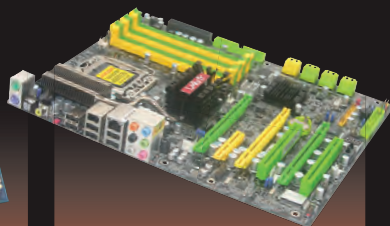
# Dream Machine

**WE WERE HOPING TO** have two new Dream Machine products for you this month, one being an actual product to fill the empty Cooling block, but the i7 upgrade kit we requested didn't arrive in time from overseas. So check back on that next month. We do, however, have a worthy replacement for the Sound award – congrats to the ASUS Xonar Essence STX! Paired with a really decent set of headphones this sound card will literally turn your gaming into an experience unlike any other. Please don't do a sound test on your granny – we won't take her call when she phones us to complain about her blown hearing aid.



## Processor

Intel Core i7 Extreme 965  
[www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)



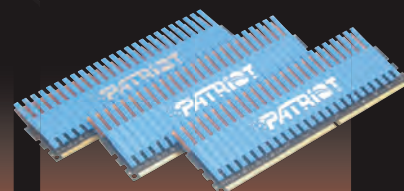
## Motherboard

DFI LANParty DK X58-T3eH6  
[www.dfi.com.tw](http://www.dfi.com.tw)



## Graphics Card

ASUS GeForce ENGTX295  
<http://za.asus.com>



## Memory

Patriot Viper 1,600MHz Triple Channel DDR3  
[www.syntech.co.za](http://www.syntech.co.za)



## Case

Cooler Master Cosmos S  
[www.sonicinformed.co.za](http://www.sonicinformed.co.za)



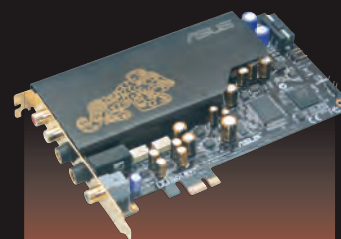
## Storage

WD Caviar SE16 500GB  
[www.wdc.com](http://www.wdc.com)



## Power Supply

IKONIK Vulcan 1,200W PSU  
[www.ikonik.com](http://www.ikonik.com)



## Sound

ASUS Xonar Essence STX  
<http://za.asus.com>



## Monitor

Samsung SyncMaster T260 LCD  
[www.samsung.co.za](http://www.samsung.co.za)



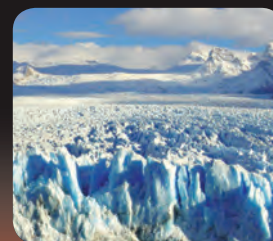
## Keyboard

Microsoft SideWinder X6  
[www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)



## Mouse

Logitech G9 Laser  
[www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



## Cooling

Coming soon. No, really! Oh, whatever...





T190, T200, T220,  
T240, T260

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Dynamic Contrast Ratio 20,000:1 (DC)

Response Time 2ms (GTG)

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BY NEO SIBEKO

## Overclocking Legend

**I**N APRIL, I ATTENDED an overclocking qualifying event (GOOC Thailand 2009, covered in this issue) with a young overclocker, Vivi who was at the time the only other person other than I who had Overclocking Guru status on hwb0t.org. While we did the best we could at the time – given our skill sets and the CPU we had – the most important thing about that entire event was how it motivated him. Vivi came back to SA and changed overclocking locally for good. Not ever has someone (any enthusiast locally or anywhere) climbed to the top of the overclocking rankings so quickly.

It's almost as if he did it by magic and the most impressive part about it all is that he only began overclocking two years ago when he was 16.

Having bought more than seven different Core 2 Duo E8600 CPUs in search of the one that would clock to stratospheric speeds, Vivi managed to find the right stepping, which he essentially paid more than twice the retail price for. However, as he would tell anyone who asked him, it was all worth it in the end.

Armed with what is without question the best LGA 775 motherboard ever made – the ASUS Rampage Extreme – a proven CPU from a renowned batch, incredible overclocking skills and some liquid nitrogen, at the time of writing, Vivi managed to break two world records in PiFast and Super PI. He then, at a later stage, managed to break the AquaMark 3 record by 4,000 points. As it stood at the time of writing, he climbed from just outside the top 100 in the world to number 11, surpassing many of the veteran overclockers in the world who live off sponsored hardware and handpicked samples.

With more results to come, there's no doubt that Vivi will go on to be in the top five overclockers in the world and possibly get a shot at the legendary KINGPIN, who has broken every single overclocking record.

Right now, it's only the beginning; and having spoken to him throughout the entire experience he assures me that some more results are coming – which should see him climb even further up the rankings. The truth is that if anybody was ever going to reach the top it was always going to be Vivi, as there has never been an overclocker locally with so much enthusiasm, dedication, patience, and the ability to stay motivated even after losing a substantial amount of hardware.

If you are wondering what other impressive results he has managed, they are as follows:

- 3DMark 2001 – 131,793 (3<sup>rd</sup>)
- 3DMark03 – 117,001 (17<sup>th</sup>)
- 3DMark05 – 43,045 (7<sup>th</sup>)
- AquaMark 3 – 393,932 (1<sup>st</sup>)
- Super PI 1M – 6.78 sec (2<sup>nd</sup>)
- PiFast – 14.14 sec (1<sup>st</sup>)
- He also holds a top-20 position in all the benchmarks, which automatically puts him in the Hall of Fame.

What you may also notice is that he has yet to run 3DMark06, 3DMark Vantage, PCMark05 and WPrime. If he attains anything in the top 20 in each of these benchmarks, he will end up in the

top five overclockers in the world.

A truly impressive showing by Vivi and a well-deserved placing in the world rankings. Besides getting praises from all over the world for his skills, I have to say that while there are many capable overclockers in the country, none is like Vivi; and as such, he is without a doubt the best overclocker SA has ever had and definitely one of the best overclockers the world has ever seen.

We will have to wait and see how he does at MSI's Master Overclocking League, but from what I have seen, he is just as likely to take the number one position as anybody else who will be competing.

Well done to Vivi, the best overclocker SA has ever known. **NAG**

Vivi the Legend  
and his AM3  
world record-  
breaking ASUSTEK  
Rampage Extreme,  
Intel Core 2 Duo  
E8600 and Zotac  
GTX295





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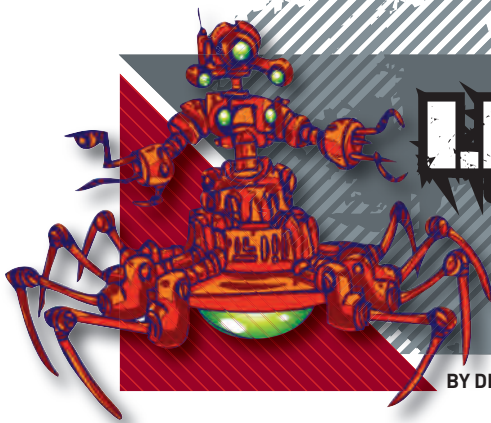


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# LIFE, HARDWARE, AND CHOICES

BY DERRICK CRAMER

## Who can top a golden-sample sucker?

**B**ELLS SHOULD BE RINGING for those of you who pay attention to the graphics card market, which at present is full of cards sporting TOP Edition, Golden Sample, Dark Knight, Superclocked, Toxic, XXX, and numerous other fancy words. Companies who label their cards as such hope that simulative language will outweigh common sense and that you'll fork out for the supposed better version of the card. So, what exactly do you get when buying one of these better cards? Let's find out.

I'll use ASUS and their infamous TOP Edition cards as an example here, specifically the ATI 4770 version. At stock, the 4770 core runs at 750MHz, with the memory at 1,600MHz (or GDDR 3,200MHz). On the TOP Edition, this has been increased to 800MHz on the core and 1,700MHz (3,400MHz) on the memory. So, 50MHz extra on the core, 100MHz extra on the memory, and a price tag that will surely verge on that of a 4850. Or worse, more. Now, this is all fair and well: you get a faster card for a higher price, so what's the problem? Well, firstly, the price will be ridiculous – that much is almost certain. Secondly, you could get yourself the standard ASUS card, or in fact a card from one of the other manufacturers, and do it yourself.

Okay, hold up. Before cries of "Ov3rcl0ck1ng i5 teh Devil!" resound from users around the world, let's backtrack and find out how ASUS gets the TOP Edition card to reach higher frequencies. It's easy enough really: just re-flash the card's BIOS with a new one that contains the higher clock speeds (and in rare cases, voltages) and reboot. TOP Edition sorted. On to packaging. This, my fellow gamers, is what we call overclocking; or if I must elaborate, taking a component and forcing it to run higher than the default speed.

So, why can't you do it yourself? What's stopping you from doing the same... re-flashing the BIOS of the card and getting the performance increase for free? Or if things like flashing the BIOS make you squeamish, why not use a program such as RivaTuner, move two sliders slightly, and save the changes?

Well, you could say overclocking isn't covered by the warranty, and you don't want to risk blowing your card for a bit of extra performance. My reply is simple: with overclocking on such a small scale (and yes, 50MHz on a midrange card is very small), the chance of you blowing the card is almost zero. In fact, while I write this, I'm taking the five-odd cards that I own to insane frequencies to try to blow them, and all I get for my efforts is a frozen PC and a restart – the cards are still working, though. As long as you don't play around with the voltage, you should be fine.

So you say the card will run hotter and that normal cards don't have the cooling power to tame the heat, so your card's lifespan will decrease. In reality, the fan speed on most modern graphics cards is never set to 100%; it usually flutters around the 45% mark. So, up the fan speed by 10% or 15% – problem solved. Sure, the card doesn't look as good, but if this is such an important aspect of buying the card, you probably won't be reading this right now.

So, what compels you to buy an overpriced edition of a graphics card? Laziness? Ignorance? A salesperson with a convincing marketing line? At the end of the day, any upgrade budget during these economic times will suffer a hit. Don't let companies take their undue share of your hard-earned cash. Work smarter, not harder. **NAG**

Before cries of "Ov3rcl0ck1ng i5 teh Devil!" resound from users around the world, let's backtrack and find out how ASUS gets the TOP Edition card to reach higher frequencies. **It's easy enough really: just re-flash the card's BIOS with a new one that contains the higher clock speeds (and in rare cases, voltages) and reboot.**







Some of the best overclockers in the world gathered for the competition



# GIGABYTE Open Overclocking Championship 2009

## Thailand Qualifiers

**E**VER SINCE 2007, GIGABYTE has been actively involved in the overclocking scene, hosting some of, if not the best competitions the overclocking scene has ever seen.

GIGABYTE has been 'out doing' themselves with each successive competition, but this year, they took a different approach and decided to have a more focused competition. That is, instead of hosting a massive number of teams and pitting them against each other, GIGABYTE has been hosting regional competitions, which have fewer teams competing for the final (which takes place during COMPUTEX in Taipei, Taiwan).

This year, South Africa was invited to the Pan-Asia qualifiers, which included Taiwan, Vietnam, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea and Australia. This made it a total of nine teams that competed for a place in the final against the winners from the other regions.

The competition took place in Bangkok, Thailand at the Computer Mall where hundreds of people gathered to watch some of the best overclockers from each respective country compete for the top spot.

High-end hardware was chosen for this competition, including two NVIDIA GeForce GTX 260 216 graphics cards per team, DDR3 memory courtesy of Kingston, i7 965 Extreme CPUs and 80GB SSDs by Intel. At every competition, GIGABYTE has made sure to provide one of their best motherboards. This time, the GIGABYTE

GA-EX58-UD4P motherboard was chosen, and for the most part, it's identical to the much more expensive GA-EX58-EXTREME board, which we had as our Dream Machine motherboard for several months.

The competition started as usual, with the competitors being given a few hours to prepare the components, from sealing to voltage modifications and any other preparations that they would need to compete. Goddy Roodt and myself represented SA, and all was going well until we decided to 'dry run' the system, only to find that nothing was working. The motherboard was cycling through the POST sequence. Twenty minutes before the beginning of the competition, we were still dealing with the issue, which caused us to disassemble the entire rig and try a different graphics card, motherboard and such.

However, we discovered that the power supply was having issues, so we swapped out the PSU and the system was up and running.

Being a competition, you select a CPU randomly and we selected an i7 that was only able to clock up to 4.6GHz. Therefore,







NightRaven and Coolice preparing their system before the competition



Zolkorn and his infamous red cap



Massive crowds gathered for the competition and the on-stage performances



our Super PI result was less than impressive as we were competing with CPUs that were running at up to 5.1GHz.

The next benchmark was part of the 3DMark06 sub tests – the HDR test. In this test, through some very good voltage modifications and superior sealing by Vivi, we managed to have the highest overclocked VGA cards, but our HDR score was only the fourth highest. It turned out that CPU speed was very important in the HDR score, even though the general consensus amongst the competitors was that the HDR test was completely GPU bound – clearly, it was not. With a fourth place in this test and a non-scoring position in Super PI 8M, we had one more benchmark: the entire 3DMark06 test. Here we scored our best result, but once again, our CPU was not capable of matching the other CPUs. Nevertheless, we still managed third place with a 29,076 score in 3DMark06.

Overall, we ended up in fifth place. Australia took first place; Taiwan was in second place and Thailand in third.

GIGABYTE kept the massive crowds of people entertained with break-dancers who put on a fantastic performance. The competition was well organised, and it seems that despite the trying economic climate, GIGABYTE did not cut corners on the competition. The world championships should be even better and we will have to see who comes out the winner of the GOOC 2009 Finals and walks away as the best overclocker in the world.

Thank you to the staff of GIGABYTE, Rectron, Zolkorn from Overclock Zone, HiCookie, and Ginny. A special thank you to Tim Handley from GIGABYTE who was always on hand to help with anything and everything. **NAG**

**The competitors went through hundreds of litres of liquid nitrogen throughout the day**



## Specifications

**Frequency:** 3.2GHz  
**Cores:** 4 (45nm)  
**Cache:** 8MB total

# AMD Phenom II X4 955 Black Edition

**THE INTERNET HAS BEEN** buzzing lately with what appears to be AMD's comeback to competitiveness in both the GPU and CPU markets. Not only did the Phenom II provide sizeable gains in performance over the original 65nm part, but we also received much higher frequencies and far better overclocking CPUs. Several months back we reviewed the Phenom II X4 925 and found that its performance was impressive, even though it did not match any i7 CPU.

However, the new CPU that is championing the cause for AMD is the Phenom II X4 955 Black Edition. Nothing much has changed in this CPU other than clock speed, and our testing proved it. In terms of performance, it's exactly as one would expect: the DDR3 performance does increase synthetic test numbers, but overall game performance isn't really affected in any way other than by the sheer frequency advantage it has over other members of the Phenom II family.

While some might have expected some improvements akin to what AMD used to provide on the 939 platform – when the process and stepping provided some performance enhancements (Winchester to Venice core, for example) – this time, nothing of the sort has taken place. We suspect that if there is a change in the stepping, it will provide better DDR3 performance and as a result, better clock-for-clock performance than what we have today.

As far as overclocking goes, the 955 has proven to be the most consistent overclocker in the entire Phenom II family – AMD has already managed a 7GHz clock speed using liquid helium. However, given the dangers of the cooling methods used, for the extreme enthusiasts liquid nitrogen will be the order of the day, and we can confirm that 6GHz was possible on the sample we tested. With more time, we could have reached an even higher speed, approaching at least 6.2GHz. However, 6GHz proves that the CPUs are incredible overclockers and 100% (usually referred to as Total OC) overlocks are more than possible.

World number-one overclocker KINGPIN managed to break two world records with his 955 BE sample, shattering the 3DMark05 and 3DMark06 records. He also recorded milestone scores of 47,110 in 3DMark05 and 36,007 in 3DMark06. These scores were beaten several weeks later by a very small margin with an i7 CPU, but what is important to note is that the CPU that beat these scores was a D0-stepping i7 at a relatively high frequency for an i7 sample. That means that the AMD CPU will likely be back again. So, it is safe to say that the Phenom II X4 955 BE has definitely gained favour with enthusiasts.

For the average user, many would want to know how far they could take their 955 CPUs. Well, as usual, it all depends on the sample, but ours was easy to take to 4GHz

(which still remains the magical mark for all CPUs on the market). At the default speed, the CPU performs incredibly and offers enough bang to power any graphics card configuration – from single-GPU to four-way GPU configurations. When overclocked to 4GHz, the performance is nothing short of incredible, as it goes through the tests and gives better results than one would expect. It seems that with increasing clock frequencies the Phenom II scales much better than any other CPU on the market.

The Phenom II X4 955 BE, despite the 3.2GHz reference clock, runs relatively cool. Even with the supplied cooler, heat is never an issue. If you have an AM3 motherboard, this is the CPU you want. If you want to build a powerful gaming machine without breaking the bank, the AMD Phenom II X4 955 BE is definitely the CPU to buy. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



## Bottom Line

The best thing to ever come from AMD since the company started.

### Plus

+ Performance  
 + Runs cool

### Minus

- Availability



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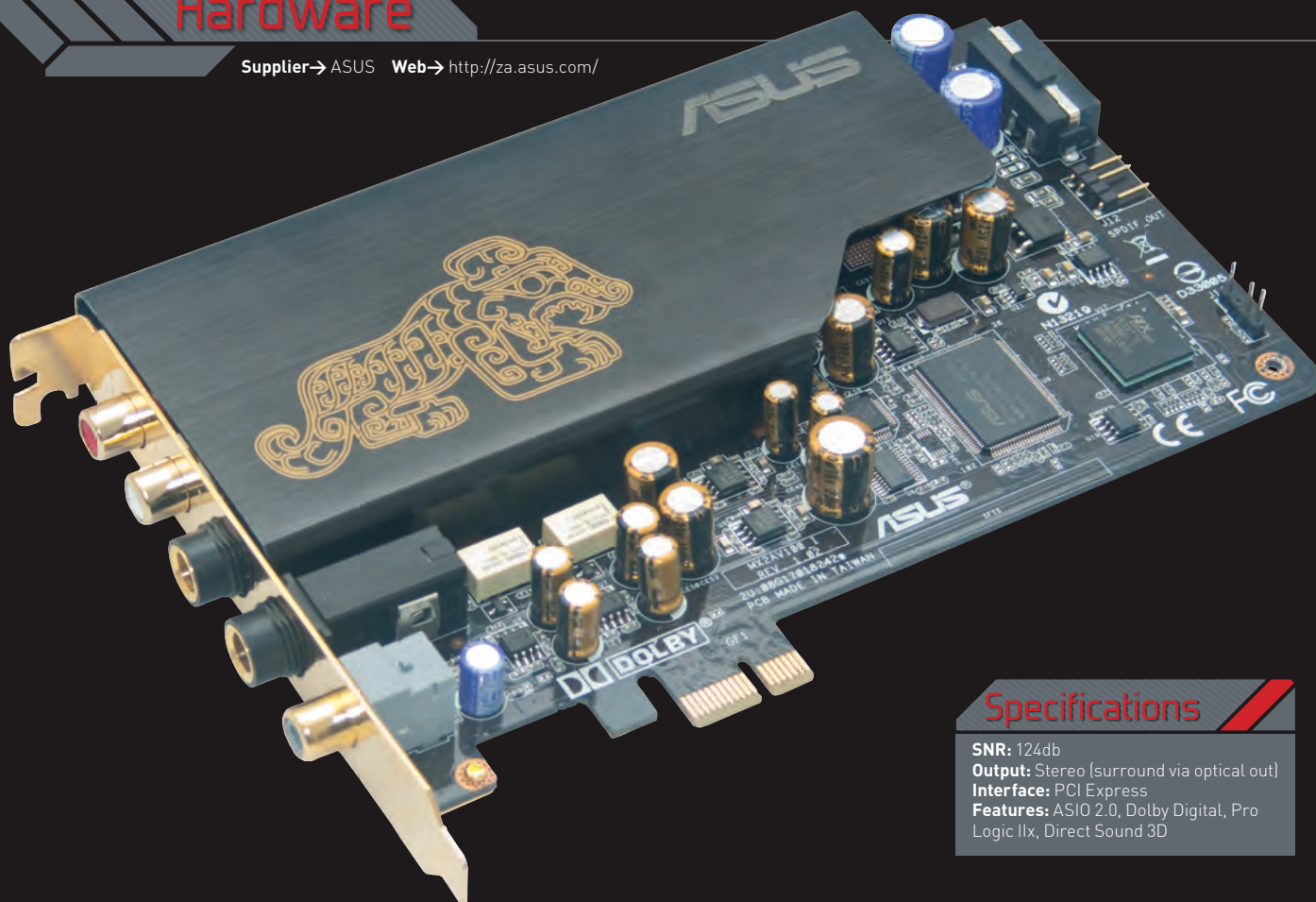
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## Specifications

**SNR:** 124db  
**Output:** Stereo [surround via optical out]  
**Interface:** PCI Express  
**Features:** ASIO 2.0, Dolby Digital, Pro Logic IIx, Direct Sound 3D

## ASUS Xonar Essence STX

**EVER SINCE ASUS INTRODUCED** the Xonar line of sound cards, it's been clear that the company wanted to establish itself as the premier sound card manufacturer for the PC. Not only did the first Xonar sound card surprise many casual gamers and audiophiles alike, but it is still considered amongst the best sound cards available for the PC, despite its age.

ASUS has been improving on the Xonar line of audio solutions and their latest addition is the Essence line, which features the STX and the slightly lower-end model, the ST. When we received the Essence STX, we expected a great sound card – especially considering that the HDAV 1.3 was without question the best sound card we had ever tested. The Xonar Essence STX had its work cut out, but it turned out that what we considered reference audio quality could be improved upon.

Indeed, it's at a point where it's increasingly difficult to tell the difference between various models and even some on-board solutions. However, when listening to the Essence STX there can be no mistaking the obvious fact that this sound card is the best-sounding audio card on the market. In fact, we would go as far as saying that nothing produced ever for the platform comes close, especially in the consumer-orientated products. There just isn't anything that's as clear as the Essence STX.

Some people may not be able to tell

the difference between this sound card and the HDAV, and understandably so: without the right set of headphones – which usually cost thousands of rands – the difference between the two is more academic than anything else. The Xonar Essence STX is incredible to listen to: all the music comes alive, and this is without any equaliser settings used – just standard out-of-the-box settings. This is especially true when using the stereo headphone output.

The Essence STX boasts some very impressive components and it all stems from the AV100 audio processor, which is capable of dealing with sampling rates of up to 192kHz, 24-bit audio. This is similar to the processor that was in the HDAV (the AV200), but it is paired with different components, which make the Essence STX the highest-quality audio solution that ASUS has. The STX boasts Texas Instruments' Burr-Brown DACs, audio capacitors from Os-Con and Nichon, and a Cirrus Logic ADC – to name but a few of the components. All the pieces help the Essence to 'boast' an incredible 124db SNR through the front output and 117db SNR for the headphone output, which is still nothing short of incredible.

As usual, the STX features just about every Dolby standard available on the market, including Dolby Digital Live, Dolby Headphones, Virtual Speaker and Pro Logic II. Missing feature sets are DTS support, Dolby Digital ES, and a few

others, but with the provided feature set, it should be more than enough for most people. Those who dabble in music creation as well may want to consider the Essence STX, as it features a full hardware-accelerated ASIO 2.0 driver, which is capable of processing audio samples at an impressive 192kHz at 24-bit resolution.

The software aspect of the STX is as one would expect. ASUS uses the same small software package found on the other Xonar sound cards. With the STX, there are small differences like being able to control gain for different types of headphones, but for the most part it's the same interface you will find on the HDAV, D2X or original Xonar card.

There isn't much to say about the Essence STX other than that it's the closest to perfection any sound card has ever come.

**NAG**

**Neo Sibeko**



### Bottom Line

There isn't a better-sounding stereo sound card on the market from any company.

#### Plus

+ Audio quality  
 + Component list

#### Minus

- Overkill for most



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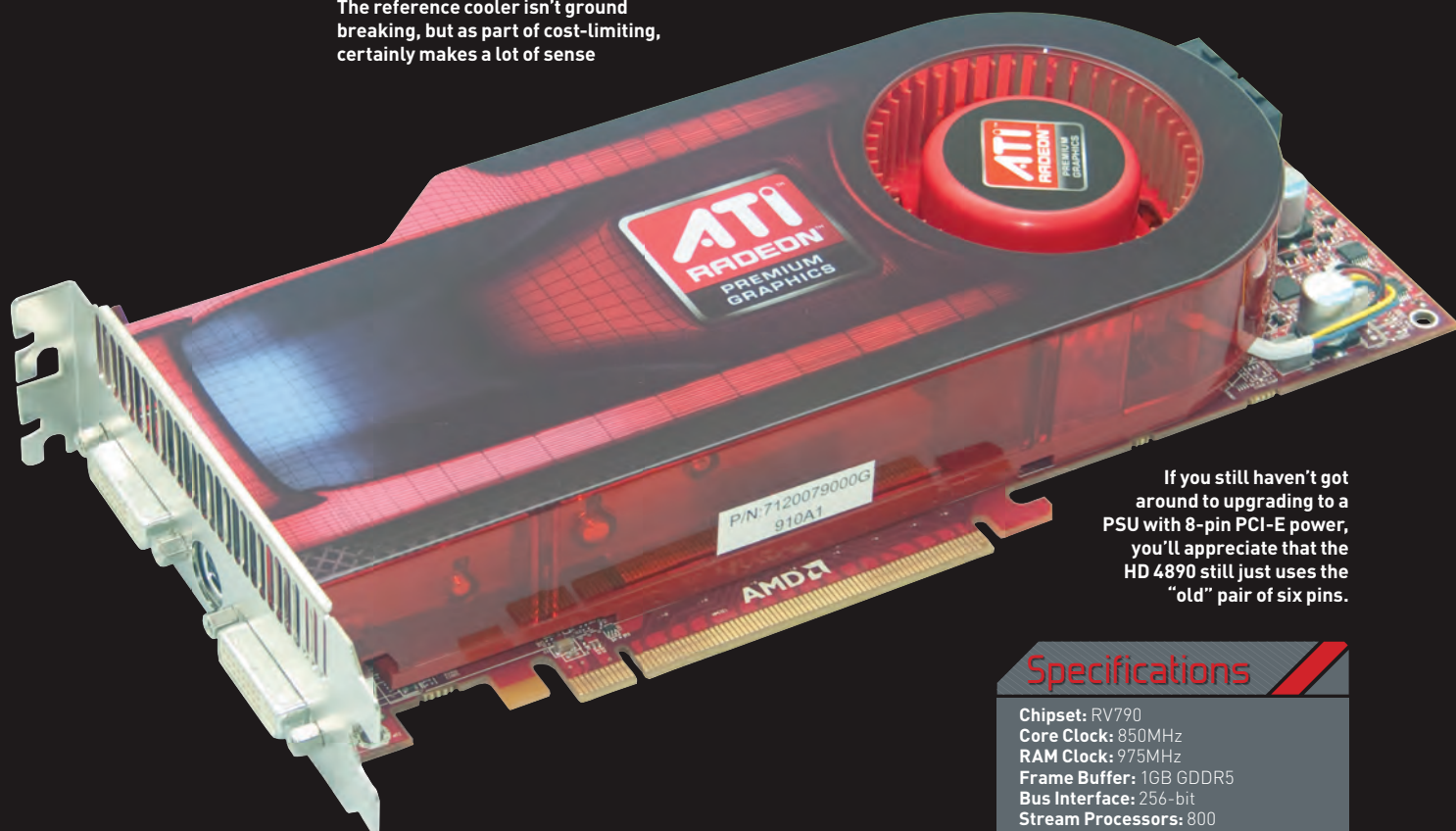
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The reference cooler isn't ground breaking, but as part of cost-limiting, certainly makes a lot of sense



If you still haven't got around to upgrading to a PSU with 8-pin PCI-E power, you'll appreciate that the HD 4890 still just uses the "old" pair of six pins.

## Specifications

**Chipset:** RV790  
**Core Clock:** 850MHz  
**RAM Clock:** 975MHz  
**Frame Buffer:** 1GB GDDR5  
**Bus Interface:** 256-bit  
**Stream Processors:** 800

## BIOSTAR Radeon HD 4890

SO, NVIDIA HAS ATI running scared, like Intel has AMD. The 285 GTX is all conquering, the 295 is the most monstrous multi-GPU beastie on the planet, and the 260 has the upper midrange quite nicely covered as well, competing directly with the previous leading competitor, the Radeon HD 4870.

Now 'Big Red' answers with this: the Radeon HD 4890, built around a whole new ASIC named RV790 and clocked usefully higher than the current range topper at 850MHz for the core and 975MHz on the GDDR5 RAM. But in almost every other way, it's identical – no radical new architecture challenging for outright performance crown, but a reworked and clocked-up 4870. A bit disappointed? Being an ATI fan, I was too at first. But then I had a quick look around at retail pricelists...

And saw that the 4890 comes in at almost the exact same price as the 4870 did. In fact, astute shoppers may find the latest-gen cards available for less than some branded 4870s – they're out there for well under the R4K mark, in fact. So, anyone who was looking to buy a 4870 is now looking at a 4890, without saving up any more pennies. Nice value then.

The way in which ATI has created the RV790 is something akin to what Porsche does with its RS models

– weight is shorn, engines are meticulously honed, rough surfaces ground away with fetishist obsession. This new ASIC, the RV790, features obsessively optimised power routing, regulation and control to create a GPU with a lot more headroom than the old version, hence the boosted clocks out of the box.

So, what's it like?

Well, 10,300 in 3DMark Vantage (Performance presets, 1,280 x 1,024) is really nothing to sneeze at. It outpaces everything up to the 275 GTX in real performance terms. There's a lot of raw rendering power in the old 256-bit Ring Bus architecture and 800 stream-processor model, no doubt. So yes, the performance improvement over the old 4870 is entirely linear, and very accurately reflected in the boost to the clock frequency. It may not be 'mould breaking', but it's undeniably effective. And at the same excellent value point, which is nice in these economic times.

Even more encouraging is the temperature envelope. The card uses the same two-slot reference cooler as the 4870, but thanks to the optimised circuitry doesn't generate as much heat despite the elevated clock – which makes the 4890 the ideal candidate for some GPU tweaking.

At 955MHz for the core, and memory

clocked up to 1,120MHz, the linear improvement in performance results continues, with 3DMark now yielding 11,438, which isn't really that far off a 285 GTX – with a much more realistic price tag. We think the board could go higher still with some improved cooling, as at these frequencies we were getting pretty close to the dangerous side.

It's a really good buy then, the HD 4890. Probably the second-fastest single-GPU solution you can buy (with some manual boosting), at a good deal less money than the 'number one spot'. I even like the engineering-heavy manner in which it's been achieved.

Without a doubt, a Radeon HD 4890 is a worthy way to upgrade your gaming rig to beast status without selling a single one of your gold teeth.

**NAG**  
**Russell Bennett**



### Bottom Line

AMD's latest HD 4890 can't run with the GTX 285, but does offer sterling performance at a great price. Overclocks very well too.

#### Plus

- + Headroom to spare
- + Great performance/price
- + Engineering focused

#### Minus

- Not a GTX 285 killer
- "New ASIC" really the RV770 perfected





The cooler may be somewhat simplified, but essentially the PCB is identical to what would have been branded a 9800 a few weeks back

## Specifications

**Chipset:** G92b  
**Core Clock:** 738MHz  
**RAM Clock:** 1,100MHz  
**Shader Clock:** 1,836MHz  
**Frame Buffer:** 1GB GDDR3  
**Bus Interface:** 256-bit

# Palit GeForce GTS 250 1GB

**H**ERE AT NAG, WE'VE found that midrange graphics cards – the ones that sell in real volumes – don't really do it for us. As a personal buying choice, I always follow the old, "best that you can afford" routine, and being journos with industry contacts, that usually means, well, quite often the very best.

So when I was allowed to hang on to an 8800 GTS for an extended test, I was at first a bit disappointed that it wasn't one of the full-blown GTXs of the time, also floating about the general hardware pool. Still, its performance was astonishing, and it remained relevant for a long time to come, still playing the latest games at just about maximum resolution just a few months ago. It at least somewhat rearranged my thinking: why pay the substantial premium of the range topper when a step below can offer such killer value?

So, maybe the new NVIDIA GTS 250 1GB – in this case from Palit – could pull off the same trick as that excellent 8800 did. This is the latest best-value, latest-generation card to be released in a flurry of 200-series launches, and purports to offer an up-to-date gaming experience for around R3K.

In fact, the comparison with the 8800 is pretty relevant: the 250 has been widely criticised for its architecture, as the card is pretty much a rebadged 9800 GTX, which itself was barely evolved from the original 8800 GTX design. It's clocked a touch higher at 738MHz on the core and

1,100MHz on the RAM, and here gets a full gigabyte (or even 2GB, also available from Palit) frame buffer.

It's what it does "against the clock," however, that really counts.

3DMark Vantage didn't show this card off in its best light. The standard 1,280 x 1,024 runs gave a GPU score of 6,630 – just shy of the 7,250 an ATI Radeon 4850 managed. Loading up the features didn't really help the ostensibly newer card either: the gap between these protagonists remained static. Of course, a 260 GTX – for around R600 more – outguns the 4850 by about the same percentage – so the older architecture is quite evident.

However, in real-world gaming tests, the venerable architecture turns it all around in a couple of ways. Firstly, it manages to reverse the advantage of the 4850 in the synthetic test, actually beating this competitive card in a few of the latest titles. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly to us, it manages to add that tasty PhysX eye candy to games that support the system – like *Mirror's Edge*, for instance – without falling apart at good resolutions. NVIDIA may well have struck gold with PhysX: it's a phenomenon that can surely only grow, depending on what the competition pulls out.

So, in this review, we've gone through excitement, to disappointment, to amazement. Leaving us a little bewildered. We also tend to disagree with taking an old product and giving it a new

name so that you can keep selling the stock; and yet, the value/performance mix of this 250 GTS isn't all that bad. Of course, in international markets this midrange offering is even more affordable than it will be in rands once it lands here, making the 250 GTS an even more appealing proposition.

However, to the standards of the real high-end cards of the day (260 GTX and up, basically), its feeling pretty limited now, this old architecture. A good job has been done of revitalising it and making it relevant again, but it's really not to the 200 series what the 8800 GTS was to its GTX siblings unfortunately, and is likely to date much faster.

It is also 3-Way SLI ready, though, so if you have R9K about, a three-slot motherboard and at least 800W from your PSU, you could be among the first to boast a three-card rig in your neighbourhood. **NAG**

Russell Bennett



## Bottom Line

Sometimes "GTS" means "just one step behind the flagship" in NVIDIA terms. With the GTS250, it's more like "a generation ago."

### Plus

- + Very affordable
- + Decent frame rates
- + PhysX support

### Minus

- Doesn't overclock
- Feels rather long in the tooth in the latest games



## Specifications

**Connectivity:** HSDPA 7.2Mbps  
**Memory:** 200MB  
**Display:** 240 x 400 (256K)  
**Camera:** 8MP



## Samsung Pixon M8800

**OF LATE, SAMSUNG SEEMS** to have received some enthusiasm in the mobile phone department. Not only are they releasing some really impressive units like the F-480 Touchwiz, the upcoming Omnia HD (8910i) and others, but the Pixon M8800 we received for review seems to be one of the better phones on the market and was definitely a surprise.

The phone is not a designer model, but the looks are functional and it's exactly what one would expect from a touch-interface phone. It feels robust, and the build quality is definitely better than what Samsung used to produce a few years ago. Some thought seems to have gone into designing this phone's features, which are over and above what users would complain about. For instance, when testing the phone we noticed how easy it was to switch to speakerphone, hold calls and such, through the powerful but very intuitive in-call interface.

One stand-out feature is the ability to customise the interface by simply dragging widgets across to the screen, which can then be arranged in any manner one deems suitable. So, it's literally possible to make a completely custom interface, unique to you and nobody else. It's these small features that stand out.

The interface is speedy and the display quality is as you would expect from Samsung: it is bright and clear and

produces vibrant colours in almost all conditions. The phone natively supports DivX media, and playing video on it is a pleasure as the phone is powerful enough to provide smooth playback with no skips or dropped frames. The Pixon is one of the few phones that one can use to watch subtitled video properly without eyestrain.

The media qualities of the phone are impressive and the audio quality is excellent (courtesy of a custom sound-processing technology, DNSe). What 'rounds up' the media features is the highly impressive 8-megapixel camera, which takes great photos – some of which are better than some cheaper 5MP point-and-shoot standalone units.

Video recording is as one would expect: it's functional and produces relatively clear videos. However, in this regard the Pixon is just above average at best.

Inputting text on the Pixon is amongst the best features of the phone. The QWERTY keyboard is made available if you hold the phone horizontally and it is very easy to use. It may take some time to get used to at first, but after a few text messages and notes, it grows on you and you'll find it hard to go back to using the regular multi-touch button layout. Using the touch screen in any of the applications and navigating the phone are pretty easy. While scroll-down menus may be difficult for some to navigate, two scroll buttons are available on the side of the phone, which will help you scroll in a more

traditional way. This is particularly useful when using the phonebook, which can prove to be a trying exercise if you have thicker fingers.

Overall, the Samsung Pixon has everything you would expect from a phone of this calibre and price. It has just about everything any modern smartphone has, including music recognition, HSDPA 7.2Mbps support, Bluetooth, and GPS functionality. In the features department, there really isn't anything major to fault the phone on other than the lack of Wi-Fi and the small 200MB on-board memory. We can forgive the lack of Wi-Fi connectivity given that the battery life is average to slightly less on the M8800, and the memory can be expanded via an SD Card to 16GB.

The Samsung Pixon is definitely worth considering if you're looking for a high-end touch-screen phone.

**NAG**  
**Neo Sibeko**

<b>Bottom Line</b> One of the best phones to ever come from Samsung's mobile phone division.	
<b>Plus</b> + Customisable interface + 8MP camera + Speed	<b>Minus</b> - Battery life





## Specs

**Features:** M3U support, equaliser  
**Capacity:** 2GB (up to 16GB available)  
**Interface:** Mini-USB

## Creative ZEN Mosaic 2GB

**THE MARKET IS FILLED** with 'makeshift' MP3 players, and for the most part, it's hard to tell them apart, because almost all of them play some form of video and support voice recording. Save for the Apple iPod, most players have a hard time 'being individual'.

The Creative ZEN Mosaic is one of the more basic players, but its simplicity will definitely appeal to some. The user interface is navigated using the buttons on the face, and while they may seem confusing at first, after spending some time with the unit, it becomes second nature to navigate the various menus.

One particularly useful feature of the Zen Mosaic is its incredibly quick transfer speed: when synching the unit using Winamp, an entire playlist of 50-odd songs can be loaded onto the unit quicker than you can on an iPod nano. The Mosaic also allows customising of

various frequencies, allowing you to get the right sound for any music type. The built-in speaker is not going to impress anyone, but it more than serves its purpose when a set of headphones is not around and you need to listen to music.

The display isn't as 'fine' as we would have liked, and individual pixels show quite easily because of the low-resolution display. However, given that this player is not really made for video playback, it is more than adequate and in no way does it cause strain on the eyes or anything of the sort.

Overall, the Creative ZEN Mosaic is amongst the better players out there and a real alternative to the cheaper iPod models, as it provides everything one needs in a mobile player - just with a very user intuitive and simple interface. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

★★★★★	
<b>Bottom Line</b>	
Great mobile media player with a simple and intuitive user interface.	
<b>Plus</b>	<b>Minus</b>
+ Easy to use	- Video quality could be better
+ Built-in speaker	

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The wheel is solid and covered in a non-slip material



Generous paddles complement the Xbox 360 controls on the face

The device can be used as a laptop or tabletop wheel

## Xbox 360 Wireless Racing Wheel

**R**ACING ENTHUSIASTS CAN NOW breathe a sigh of relief. The official Xbox 360 Wireless Racing Wheel has arrived, and it brings with it a more realistic driving experience overall.

Being an official product, this wheel fits in perfectly with the Xbox 360 collection. Call me picky, but a matched aesthetic is always better than a thrown-together one. Add to that the fact that this wheel is solidly constructed, and you have a winner on your hands.

Microsoft is not new to the world of racing wheels, and the experience gained from producing the SideWinder range of devices shows in this particular model. It is a bit bulky, overall, and isn't particularly light, either. But it's not going to crush the user when used as a laptop device, and the wider design of the unit adds a bit of overall stability, whether placed on the user's lap or secured to a handy surface. With either option available out of the box, the device brings a nice degree of versatility with it.

The wheel itself is brutally solid, and of a comfortable size. The face of the wheel

features standardised Xbox controls (sans analogue sticks, naturally), supported by generously proportioned paddles behind the wheel and a pair of pedals housed in a non-slip base. How 'non-slip' that base really is depends on the surface it is being used on: it won't move on a carpet, but slippery tiles may result in a little bit of movement.

The entire setup is powered by a pair of AA batteries. These are well hidden inside the unit (and a bit of a pain to replace) and deliver a surprisingly good battery life.

The true beauty lies in the device's wireless performance. It's not completely wireless, as the pedals are connected to the wheel by way of a cable, but this is an unobtrusive wire that won't be accidentally unplugged. Connecting the device is super simple (it works like any other Xbox 360 controller) and, although the documentation claimed that the console needed to be updated with included software, later versions of the Xbox 360 software automatically support the wheel.

The force feedback employed by the

wheel is subtle – just enough to imply the desired sensations. No one is going to be physically harmed by this one.

The only true downside is that, when using the wheel as a laptop device, the player's leg movements can tilt it slightly. This, in all honesty, is a tiny problem, with countless ways around it. So, in a nutshell, racing enthusiasts will have little to complain about when using this elegant and responsive racing wheel.

**NAG**

**Walt Pretorius**

<b>Bottom Line</b> A solidly built, responsive and elegant wheel for the Xbox 360.	
<b>Plus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Solidly built</li> <li>+ Excellent performance</li> <li>+ Elegant design</li> </ul>	<b>Minus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Laptop leg movement</li> <li>- Changing batteries is a pain</li> </ul>



Supplier → Foxcomp Web → www.ocztechnology.com



## Specifications

**Dimensions:** 99.8mm x 69.63mm x 9.3mm  
**Weight:** 77g  
**Seek Time:** < 1ms  
**Cache Size:** 64MB  
**Power Consumption:** 2W (operation), 0.5W (standby)  
**MTBF:** 1.5 million hours

This SATA-based SSD stores data at speeds of around twice the fastest conventional option, but at 50 times the price

## OCZ Vertex Series SSD 30GB

**O**CZ IS JUST ONE of those companies, isn't it? They make extremely quick, inexplicably sexy semiconductor components - at a price premium, of course.

The fact that this company has entered the storage market is, at first, weird. Not when you look closer of course, and realise that while this Vertex Series drive might be a SATA II drive, it's 2.5 inches of speedy solid-state storage - 30GB of it, in fact.

Using memory chips that aren't volatile in a sleek 2.5-inch enclosure has to be a pretty good thing. Electronic (rather than magnetic) storage has always been much quicker, but cost and the volatility issue have always prevented it moving from processing to actual storage operations. Mostly cost in fact.

There's no doubt that it's fast. SiSoft reported its read speeds at 209MB/sec average, peaking at 232MB/sec. Certainly, it's a less consistent graph than a regular HDD, but it's 'blazing'. Fast enough to take the data being streamed from two drives at once in theory; although in practice we saw a phenomenal 64MB/sec write speed to the Vertex from a single drive, while a second file transfer on the same drive

saw each stream doing 44MB/sec for a total of 88MB/sec.

SiSoft wasn't happy testing its write speed, except as a mobile storage device lined up against USB-based competition (which is pretty close spiritually). But as theory would suggest, our real-world tests showed identical performance to the read testing: 88MB/sec with two file operations going. And the performance would likely continue to scale as our drive speed or number of drives on their own bus increased - up to that indicated 200MB/sec potential. That makes it the quickest storage I've ever tested, in fact. But it is still costly.

Whether double the performance of the quickest 10,000rpm SATA II drives is worth this kind of price delta, well... For this kind of money, you really could get well over a terabyte of conventional HDD. That, to me, suggests that the price barrier inhibiting general adoption might still be worth noting. There's nothing at all wrong with the product, though: it delivers blistering throughput for someone with pockets you just can't really touch the bottom of.

**NAG**  
**Russell Bennett**



### Bottom Line

Blistering performance, but at a steep price premium. Gigabyte for gigabyte, it's about 50 times the cost of a conventional SATA drive.

#### Plus

- + Performance
- + Very low power draw

#### Minus

- Expensive
- Performance graph is not at all linear

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# District 9

**M**ANY OF YOU MAY remember the cancelled *Halo* film, which was to be directed by South African Neill Blomkamp and produced by Peter Jackson. While there's no positive news on that, the two haven't been sitting idle all this time. In fact, their whole team has been very busy, not just in producing a new film, but also in setting up a widespread and highly intriguing viral marketing campaign; one that has fallen into place now that *District 9* (which is based on Blomkamp's original short *Alive in Joburg*) has been announced and a trailer revealed.

The film stars unknowns Sharlto Copley, David James, Jason Cope and Mandla Gaduka in an alternate-present version of Johannesburg in which aliens are living among us. In this dark and gritty world, aliens (or non-humans, as they're called) that crash-landed on our planet have all been rustled up and stuffed into eerily familiar-looking districts, while the guys in black suits fiddle with their spacecraft. An evil government

organisation known as Multinational United, or MNU, has decided that the powerful resources that these aliens possess are far too great to be wasted on non-humans, and try to claim it all for themselves. To enforce this, they introduce a doctrine of fear and panic to spread hatred among humans – urging them to distrust the alien race and report any undesirable activity. While this is happening, the MNU is secretly tinkering away at the crashed alien spacecraft in D9 to extract the powerful technologies – which many aliens believe will be used for weaponry.

The film will take a documentary style mixed with dramatised scenes, showing interviews with concerned locals living in and around District 9 and a few silhouetted chats with detained non-humans. While we can obviously appreciate the social and political commentary, many will perceive the film purely as an interesting take on science fiction that falls into rank alongside the likes of *Cloverfield* and *Alien Nation*.



# There's a gamer in all of us

**P**OP CULTURE IS A funny thing. It's funny because the last time we checked, gaming wasn't nearly as cool as it's made out to be in Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor's upcoming film *Gamer*. Not that we're the type to complain, of course, as the film has a rather cool concept running the show and plenty of hardcore action to back it up. Nevertheless, it's great that gaming has become as cool as it apparently is, otherwise we simply wouldn't have films like this to look forward to.

*Gamer* takes place in a warped and gritty future society where prison inmates are forced to do battle to entertain the masses for a shot at freedom. Sure, it's hardly original if you leave it at that, but the twist comes in where these inmates aren't just shooting each other because they've been told to, they're doing so because there's another person (a gamer) controlling their every action. As one would expect, nobody has ever beaten the system and completed the 30 sessions to earn their freedom, but soon-to-be-released Kabel, played by Gerard Butler (who everyone should remember from *300*), has to fight for not just his freedom, but for the lives of his family members awaiting his return.

Joining Gerard Butler is Michael C. Hall (Dexter, from the TV show of the same name) as the obligatory evil guy running the show, Alison Lohman

(*Beowulf*, *Matchstick Men*), Amber Valletta (*Transporter 2*, *Hitch*) and Kyra Sedgwick (*Justice League: The New Frontier*, *Loverboy*). The film's directors are also credited with writing and directing *Crank* and its sequel. If you're not quite sure that *Gamer* is going to deliver enough punch and are unfamiliar with *Crank*, do yourself a favour and dig up a trailer or two.





# Preaching to the choir

**FOLLOWERS OF GARTH ENNIS** and Steve Dillon's excellent comic series *Preacher* should be pleased to know that age-old talks of a film adaptation are moving forward. Sam Mendes, director of *America Beauty*, *Jarhead* and *Road to Perdition*, has had his name attached to the film several times despite his previous dismissal of the idea. He's finally stopped with the secrecy and denial, and has even begun talks of a sequel or two. "You have to try and get one really good and then, if you're lucky, you can make a second or a third," said Mendes. John August has been confirmed by Mendes as the writer for this project. Judging by his previous work in titles such as *Corpse Bride*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Big Fish*, we're



confident that he'll be able to step up to the challenge. There's no word yet from the original graphic novel creators on their involvement in this project.

# Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

**KEANU REEVES' BROAD SPECTRUM** of acting skills will soon be put to the test now that he's signed up to star in the next remake of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Nicholas Winding Refn is currently in negotiations to direct the film and Justin Haythe, who's recently written the screenplay for *Revolutionary Road*, will be taking charge of the script. This film, not to be confused with Guillermo del Toro's upcoming adaptation of the classic story, will simply be called *Jekyll*. Nicholas Winding Refn is known for his gritty style, having directed *Valhalla Rising* and the *Pusher* trilogy. No expected release dates have been announced but it looks like the film is still a way off.



# Bury the hatchet

**YET ANOTHER COMIC BOOK** adaptation is making its way to the big screen in the form of *Jonah Hex*. The original comic series, which began in 1977 after the lead character Jonah Hex dominated the *Weird Western Tales* series, follows the adventures of Jonah in a twisted Western world of cowboys and voodoo magic. The film stars Josh Brolin (*Planet Terror*, *American Gangster*) as Hex, Will Arnett (who recently 'starred' as the voice of Matt Hazard), John Malkovich (*Burn After Reading*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) as Turnbull and Megan Fox (*Transformers* and its sequel) as Leila. The film is being directed by Jimmy Hayward, whose directorial debut was with *Horton Hears a Who!*. *Jonah Hex* is expected to hit cinemas worldwide in August 2010.



# Movies

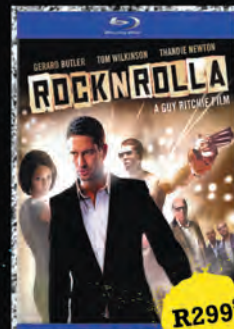
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## Blu-ray



Doom

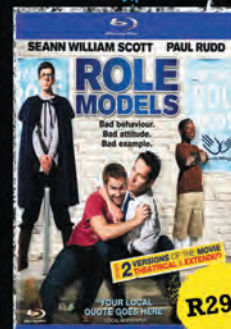
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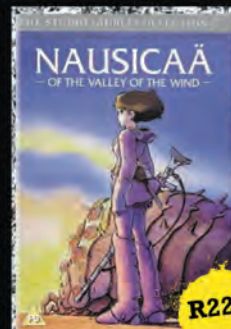


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## Taken

Age Rating: 16 (V)

Running Time: 90 minutes



**Director:** Pierre Morel

**Cast:** Liam Neeson | Maggie Grace | Leland Orser | Jon Gries | Holly Valance

**Genre:** Action Thriller

**THIS BEING A VERY** good flick, I shall refrain from any major plot spoilers. Liam Neeson plays the role of a CIA retiree, now occasionally taking on body-guarding assignments for celebrities. His ex-wife has married some tycoon, but they still have their daughter in common. Played by Maggie Grace, the daughter goes off on a European holiday with a friend, but almost immediately after arriving, they are kidnapped. Neeson's character has a charismatic brief conversation with the lead kidnapper, and then sets off to recover his daughter. While this is very much an action film, it has a far better developed story than most such movies. Neeson follows a trail that has almost gone cold, and uses clever, imaginative techniques in doing so. He also demonstrates that he will stop at nothing to save his daughter. He runs afoul of the French authorities, as his methods are not entirely legal, and far from peaceful. The action scenes are well presented, and I was particularly impressed with the sound and feel of gunfire, as well as the unarmed combat style, which is dirty and not flashy, but rather focuses on being effectively lethal. This movie has a gritty, realistic feel, and depicts a father with a rather special skill set who will go to any brutal lengths required to get his daughter back. It has a good balance between action and dialogue, and is overall just an awesome watch. Highly recommended! The only criticism I have is the fact that many may not consider this a DVD to own, but rather one to rent.

Alex Jelagin

Extreme Magic the Gathering



## Australia

Age Rating: 13PG (PLV)

Running Time: 158 minutes



**Director:** Baz Luhrmann

**Cast:** Nicole Kidman | Hugh Jackman | David Wenham | Bryan Brown

**Genre:** Romantic Drama

**HOW TO MAKE THE** perfect cup of instant coffee: Start with a quality brand of instant coffee. Nescafé Gold is a good choice. Add one heaping teaspoon of coffee and two teaspoons of sugar to your mug. For a more exotic flavour, try using brown treacle sugar. Mix the two substances thoroughly. Add 10ml of warm full-cream milk and blend with the coffee/sugar mixture until it forms a thick paste. It's important to make sure that the coffee and sugar all completely dissolve; otherwise you'll end up with bits of coffee crystals floating in the cup. Add another 20-30ml of milk and stir again until the mixture is completely 'incorporated'. Fill a kettle with cold, filtered water and bring to a boil. Allow the kettle to sit for 30 seconds after boiling. This allows the water to cool a few degrees, so it won't burn your coffee or milk. Hold the teaspoon over the top of the mug and slowly pour the water into the spoon, allowing it to cascade into the cup. Stir four to six times to create a slight froth on top, then sprinkle with a bit of cocoa powder and enjoy! By contrast, *Australia*, starring Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman is trite, overacted, entirely too long and will leave a bitter taste in your mouth.

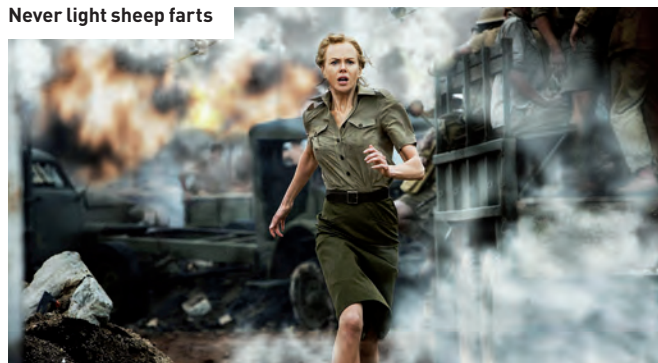
Chris Bistline



The sheep said no



Never light sheep farts





# Bangkok Dangerous

Age Rating: 16 (VL)

Running Time: 95 minutes



**Directors:** Oxide Pang Chun | Danny Pang  
**Cast:** Nicolas Cage | Shahkrit Yamnarm | Charlie Yeung  
**Genre:** Action

**NICOLAS CAGE STARS IN** this generic action film about a tough-as-nails assassin who's looking to quit the business after one last big job. The film is directed by Oxide Pang Chun and Danny Pang, both of who are responsible for a number of generic action films in Hong Kong as well as the

1999 original on which this film is based.

As Joe, Nicolas Cage takes on a young local pickpocket as his messenger to assist him in pulling off this big score. A couple of uninteresting assassinations later and things change for the worse. Political intrigue, acts of betrayal and questionable trust, as well as a deaf mute love interest with whom Cage attempts to interact are all present to take you to that next level of boredom and keep you there.

If you're looking for bland visual effects, car chases and cheesy montages, and don't care

too much about interesting stories, riveting characters or clever plot twists, this might just be the film for you. On the flipside, if you're after something a little more entertaining than watching Nicolas Cage's hairline recede while he struggles with the intricacies of acting with facial expressions, you'd be wasting your time with this. Aside from some boring trailers, there's an alternate ending, which is honestly the best part of the film. For the life of me, I can't think why they went with the other option.

**Geoff Burrows**

**The recession claims another victim: Cage's hairline**



# Bolt

Age Rating: PG

Running Time: 96 minutes



**Director:** Chris Williams  
**Cast:** John Travolta | Miley Cyrus | James Lipton | Susie Essman | Mark Walton  
**Genre:** Animation

**IT SEEMS THAT EVERYWHERE** you look these days there is a new animation on DVD. While there was some hype around *Bolt* when it was released, it crept under the radar for the most part since then. As animations of

this sort go, *Bolt* is entertaining for both a young and mature audience and its underlying plot will certainly give you some food for thought. The movie follows the life of Bolt, a celebrity dog who is led to believe that all his on-screen antics and superpowers are the real deal. When he thinks that his on-screen co-star, Penny, is kidnapped, he escapes the confines of his trailer home to rescue her. Still thinking he has superpowers, he embarks on a cross-country journey, meeting an array of interesting characters along the way, the most memorable of which are the three pigeons -

clichéd yes, but good for a laugh. The two main characters are voiced by John Travolta (Bolt) and Miley Cyrus (Penny). *Bolt* is an entertaining movie that is definitely signalling the return of animation giant Walt Disney Animation Studios. The DVD extras include a new animated short called Super Rhino, as well as the usual fair of behind-the-scenes clips and interviews. There is also a documentary on how the filmmakers designed the look of the film. *Bolt* certainly is a fun movie that will fit in nicely in any animation collection.

**Regardt van der Berg**





## Twilight

Age Rating: 10 (V)

Running Time: 117 minutes



Director: Catherine Hardwicke

Cast: Kristen Stewart | Robert Pattinson | Billy Burke | Peter Facinelli

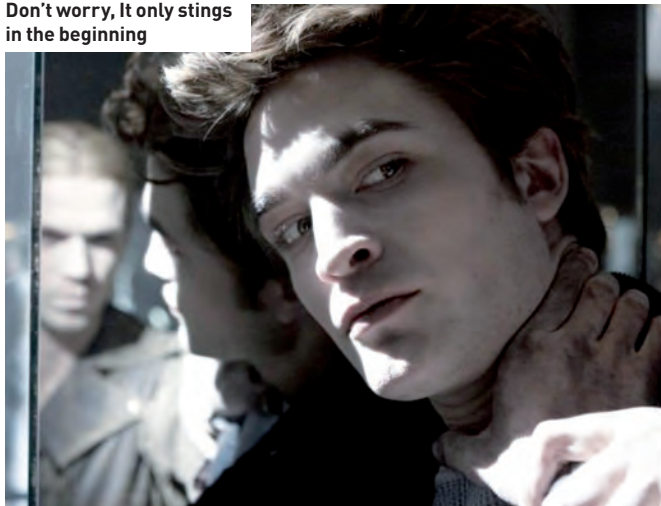
Genre: Teen Romance

**O**F ALL MYTHICAL UNDEAD entities, vampires have been glamorised and romanticised the most. This has often been interestingly portrayed, and well executed, but at other times it seems that the sheer horror of vampirism is completely missed. In *Twilight*, we have a typical and extreme example of overly romanticised vampires. A young woman moves into a small town. There are the typical clichéd “new kid in the school” dynamics and teen romantic attractions. One boy is supposedly a heartthrob (he actually looks like an emo, and possibly a homosexual prat), and the girl falls for him. He is unusual and mysterious, and seems to have superhuman abilities. All of these are, of course, typical vampire powers, but the penny doesn’t drop. No, she uses Google for answers, and **eventually** figures out the truth. Then we are treated to the usual clichés of “You are such a temptation to me”, “I am dangerous to you”, blah, blah, blah. Oh, but fear not – he and his family (of vampires, that’s right) are actually vegetarians! Then we get a cheesy and lame scene of this family playing baseball – leveraging their superhuman powers, of course. And then we have some very contrived and predictable conflict introduced for some ‘excitement’. All this happens at an excruciatingly slow pace. One nice touch, however, is the rationale presented in this film about why vampires shun sunlight: it doesn’t destroy or even harm them, but rather reveals their non-human nature for all to see. To sum up, I can recommend this movie if you are a sentimental teenage girl (no offense there). But if you are anyone else, it’s probably best to stay away.

Alex Jelagin



Don't worry, It only stings in the beginning



## Zombie Diaries

Age Rating: 18 (LVB)

Running Time: 80 minutes



Director: Michael Bartlett, Kevin Gates

Cast: Russel Jones | Craig Stovin | Jonnie Hurn

Genre: Horror

**T**HERE'S A MASSIVELY PRESUMPTUOUS quote on the cover of this DVD that claims that *Zombie Diaries* is “The best zombie movie ever.” Let me set the record straight here and tell you that in no possible universe, with no amount of substance abuse or good moods could this film be anywhere close to the best zombie movie ever.

With that out of the way, let’s examine why this film is so appalling. Many people expect zombie films to be bad – but not terrible. ‘Bad’ zombie films are generally seen as good because they’re cheesy, camp and over the top, or simply mindless and entertaining. *Zombie Diaries*, on the other hand, takes itself very seriously, but can’t hold its own against other series zombie flicks like *28 Days Later* due to awful acting, annoying camerawork (although to be fair, it is a *Blair Witch*-style ‘handicam film’, but that doesn’t make it any less annoying) and a layer of ‘depth’ that reads more like a trite afterthought than anything worth caring about. It’s not scary in the least bit, either – despite the other quote adorning the cover. The whole thing plays out like a bad student film, which it must be, since the chaps in charge (who wrote, directed, edited and produced this film) have nothing but this masterpiece to their name. While it might be worth a giggle or two with a group of friends, avoid this film like the plague in any other context.

Geoff Burrows



I want your boerie





# How to Lose Friends and Alienate People

Age Rating: 16 (LN)

Running Time: 105 minutes



**Director:** Robert B. Weide

**Cast:** Simon Pegg | Kirsten Dunst | Megan Fox |

Gillian Anderson | Jeff Bridges | Danny Huston

**Genre:** Comedy

**CAN SIMON PEGG DO** no wrong? He reinvented the zombie movie with *Shaun of the Dead*, the buddy-cop movie with *Hot Fuzz* and recently stepped into the shoes of Scotty in J.J. Abrams' *Star Trek*. *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People* has some comedic genius, a lot of

ho-hum and a little romance, adding up to a disappointing movie that just barely fills the gaps. It's a predictable good-natured comedy about the rise and fall and rise of a struggling British celebrity journalist who steps out of his old life and into a new one. Simon Pegg plays Sidney Young who is hired by the editor (Jeff Bridges) of the slick and stylish celebrity magazine, *Sharps*. Sidney finally realises his lifelong ambition of rubbing elbows with A-list celebrities, but always manages to offend and bumble his way into trouble. It's the perfect setting for a darker comedy (like *Shaun of the*

*Dead and Hot Fuzz*), but this one doesn't ever show any real teeth (except for the dog bit); and the whole thing eventually devolves into romantic slush at the end. This one should have been a classic, considering the calibre of the actors and the fun story. Perhaps giving it to an inexperienced director is the problem. There's some commentary on the movie as well as a few gag-reel snippets and deleted scenes. If you're bored on a Sunday afternoon, give it a look or wait for it on satellite. But don't waste your money actually buying it.

Michael James

That water looks cold



The old "look like you're busy listening to somebody, but actually trying to look at the girl's cleavage using peripheral vision" ploy



# The Day the Earth Stood Still

Age Rating: 13PG (V)

Running Time: 95 minutes



**Director:** Scott Derrickson

**Cast:** Keanu Reeves | Jennifer Connelly | Kathy Bates

**Genre:** Action Thriller

**THIS REIMAGINING OF THE** 1951 film of the same name is in no way special, yet warrants a watch because it is somehow enjoyable despite its mundane nature. See, the film deals with an alien "invasion" of Earth, except that the only aliens we ever get to see is the one played by Keanu Reeves and some other

random character who shows up for one of the film's 95 minutes and then is never seen again. Sure, there's a giant robot, but it turns out that it's not even a real robot. I like my sci-fi films to feature actual creepy aliens that have thousands of heads and millions of razor-sharp teeth (or something to that effect at least, so long as they're not human – like the xenomorphs from the *Alien* series). Not some alien that has taken on human form because its civilisation couldn't afford decent visual effects. Regardless of my disappointment at the lacklustre representation of aliens in this

flick, I found myself entertained throughout and extreme boredom never raised its ugly head. The acting is decent, the visuals are mostly impressive (aside from some questionable CGI), and the message that the movie attempts to convey is clichéd but nevertheless thought provoking. The DVD features some interesting extras such as the "Watching the Skies: In Search of Extraterrestrial Life" feature. Other added features include deleted scenes, some more features on the making of the film and still galleries from the movie.

Dane Remendes

And if you click this button here, you go into massage recline mode





## Captain America Theater of War: A Brother in Arms

**Format:** Comic One-Shot | **Publisher:** Marvel | **Writer:** Paul Jenkins  
**Artist:** John McCrea | **Price:** R41.50

**THE LATEST ONE-SHOT FEATURING** Captain America, *A Brother in Arms*, takes us back to Captain America's early days during World War II, where he leads a force of US Army Rangers deep into German territory to capture and hold a strategic location. But things go wrong early in the mission when the element of surprise is lost. Then, things steadily get worse for the small group of American soldiers as reinforcements are delayed and they must face wave after wave of Germans, and still deal with troubles on their own side. Paul Jenkins penned a compelling war story, and keeps Captain America's character true to form, with steadfast faith in his men and unbendable principles. However, Jenkins also maintains the gritty war comic feel. McCrea's artwork not only adds to the intensity of the battle scenes, but also conveys the emotions of the characters within the panels. *A Brother in Arms* is a nicely put together war story, and even though it features a superhero, it still 'holds' its war comic feel.



Clive Burmeister



## Dark Reign: Hawkeye #1

**Format:** Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Marvel  
**Writer:** Andy Diggle | **Artist:** Tom Raney | **Price:** R42.95

**WITH NORMAN OSBORN (AKA** Green Goblin) now having replaced Tony Stark as director of SHIELD (now called HAMMER), and having replaced the Avengers with his own Dark Avengers (see *Dark Avengers #1*), things are beginning to go in new directions for the world. But much to Osborn's distaste, some of the super-villains he uses to imitate the world's greatest heroes, the Avengers, aren't taking to their roles too gracefully. Enter Bullseye: acting in the role of Hawkeye, Bullseye is struggling to keep his true nature - killing anyone he feels like - at bay. When Osborn reprimands him, 'Hawkeye' heads out into the night to relieve some of his pent-up aggression, which he does with wanton psychopathic glee. But the dilemma for Osborn only grows, as the events of the night don't go unnoticed. If you like your heroes bad to the bone and evil lunatics disguised as heroes, then the *Dark Reign* comics are what you've been waiting for; and Bullseye does it all oh so well.



Clive Burmeister



## Terminator Salvation

**Format:** Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** IDW | **Writers:** Dara Naraghi, Jeff Mariotte  
**Artists:** Alan Robinson, Don Figueroa | **Price:** R230

**TERMINATOR SALVATION IS ALMOST** upon us. What better way to prepare yourself than by re-watching the original films and getting to know the characters and world of *Salvation* with the official movie-prequel graphic novel? Within these pages, you'll find two separate books - *Prequel* and *Adaptation*. *Prequel* is what you're really after. It follows the story of resistance cells across the world as they join forces and take the fight back to the machines post Judgement Day. There's very little focus on John Connor here. The art style is gritty and excellently drawn by Chilean veteran Alan Robinson, followed by the outsourced colouring that uses a commanding and surprisingly vibrant palette that conveys mood with ease. Dara Naraghi's writing is a little more on the functional side rather than the artistic, but it moves the story along at a good pace and serves its purpose admirably.

When you're done with that, you'll be treated to a preview of the comic book adaptation of the film. Its dialogue and text, courtesy of *Buffy* veteran Jeff Mariotte, is tastefully minimal, and the powerful art is clean where necessary and gritty the rest of the time thanks to Don Figueroa's (*Transformers: The War Within*) expert pencilling.



Geoff Burrows





## Star Wars Adventures: Han Solo and the Hollow Moon of Khorya

**Format:** Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Dark Horse | **Writer:** Jeremy Barlow  
**Artist:** Rick Lacy | **Price:** R84.95

**T**HE *STAR WARS ADVENTURES* comics from Dark Horse are a line of stories set in the *Star Wars* universe, and aimed at kids and teenagers. The stories, although still as exciting as any *Star Wars* tale, lack the violence depicted in the series aimed for the 'older market', but still maintain a level of depth and understanding of the *Star Wars* characters, worlds and background. In this book, *Han Solo and the Hollow Moon of Khorya*, the famous smuggler finds himself in a tricky situation, as he tries to pay off a debt to an alien mobster. When the plan goes wrong – as it always does – Solo finds himself in the middle of a fight between the gangsters and the Imperial forces, while just trying to survive. Meanwhile, Solo's partner, Chewbacca, must fight for his own survival, as the mob keeps him to ensure Solo's cooperation. Fast paced, action packed, and easy to read and get into, the book is a great standalone read for the younger *Star Wars* fans.



Clive Burmeister



## The Strange Adventures of HP Lovecraft #1 (of 4)

**Format:** Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Image | **Writer:** Mac Carter  
**Artist:** Tony Salmons | **Price:** R53.50

**A**S **HOWARD LOVECRAFT**, A gifted if slightly eccentric writer, struggles with writer's block and a somewhat stagnant and unfulfilled life, he begins to encounter strange happenings 'developing' from within the dark confines of his own twisted imagination. Could his most recent idea regarding a new story for the pulp horror magazine, *Weird Tales*, be more than just the 'creative flair' of his own warped mind? *The Strange Adventures of HP Lovecraft* is a fictitious account, using Lovecraft's legacy of grim horror tales as a platform and setting for a supernatural chronicle starring the original author himself. Writer Mac Carter does a good job in bringing Lovecraft's work into his own story, while keeping with the original concepts of Lovecraft's horror genre. Tony Salmons does a wonderful job in bringing Lovecraft's world as well as the world of his imagination to life with the comic's vivid artwork.



Clive Burmeister



## Thor: Ages of Thunder

**Format:** Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Marvel | **Writer:** Matt Fraction  
**Artists:** Various | **Price:** R180

**T**HOR, WIELDER OF THE mighty hammer Mjolnir, killer of giants and favoured son of the Norse god Odin hasn't got it as easy as most people would think. Every time one of his fellow Norse gods decides to spark anarchy in one of the nine worlds, it's always Thor who's left to right their wrongdoings. Loki (god of lies and mischief), the Enchantress Ildun, his own father – they're always causing him some form of anguish. It has to eventually reach a point where enough is enough, and this collection of one-shots deals with Thor's trials and tribulations in a time where frost giants wage war against Asgard, the realm of the gods, a time where the other gods' shortcomings are a thorn in Thor's side. The collection features four one-shot comics brought together in one location, each of them penned by writer Matt Fraction but illustrated by numerous artists. Fraction's writing suits the Thor mythos perfectly and the artwork, despite having been handled by a multitude of illustrators, never fails to impress. The art ranges from serious styles that resemble paintings to more old-school, classic art styles that contrast at points where the story calls for it. If you're a fan of the character, *Thor: Ages of Thunder* is well written and pleasing to the eye, while still telling a compelling story (or stories).



Dane Remendes





## Wolverine: Mean Muggin' and Deadpool Combat T-shirts **Wolverine**



**RRP:** R190  
**Supplier:** [www.awx.co.za](http://www.awx.co.za)

Still can't get enough of Wolverine even though you've seen the latest movie, read the comic book tie-in and played the game? Then you're going to want these to keep good ol' 'Wolvie as close as possible.



## Ugly Dolls Series 1 **Vinyl Trading Figures**

**RRP:** R95 each  
**Supplier:** [www.awx.co.za](http://www.awx.co.za)

We're not sure what's going on with these little guys, but we can tell you that they're created by toy designers David Horvath and Sun-Min Kim. Do what you want with that info.



## Elwyn PVC Statue **Shining Wind**

**RRP:** R510  
**Supplier:** [www.awx.co.za](http://www.awx.co.za)

Pulled straight from the RPG series *Shining Wind*, this statue, modelled after the character Elwyn and sculpted by Hirotohi Nakamura, comes with its own display stand. It comes highly recommended for fans of girls with extremely pointy ears. *NAG* takes no responsibility for eyes lost due to said ears.



## Wacky Wobbler BobbleHead **Terminator Salvation**

**RRP:** R155  
**Supplier:** [www.awx.co.za](http://www.awx.co.za)

People just can't seem to get enough of bobble heads. At last, this T600 bobble head has come to save us from our addiction to bobble heads by destroying all the bobble heads that came before it. Need proof that this guy is here simply to bring destruction and anarchy to all things bobble headed? Check out his eyes. They glow red when his head bobbles. Everyone knows red eyes are pure evil...





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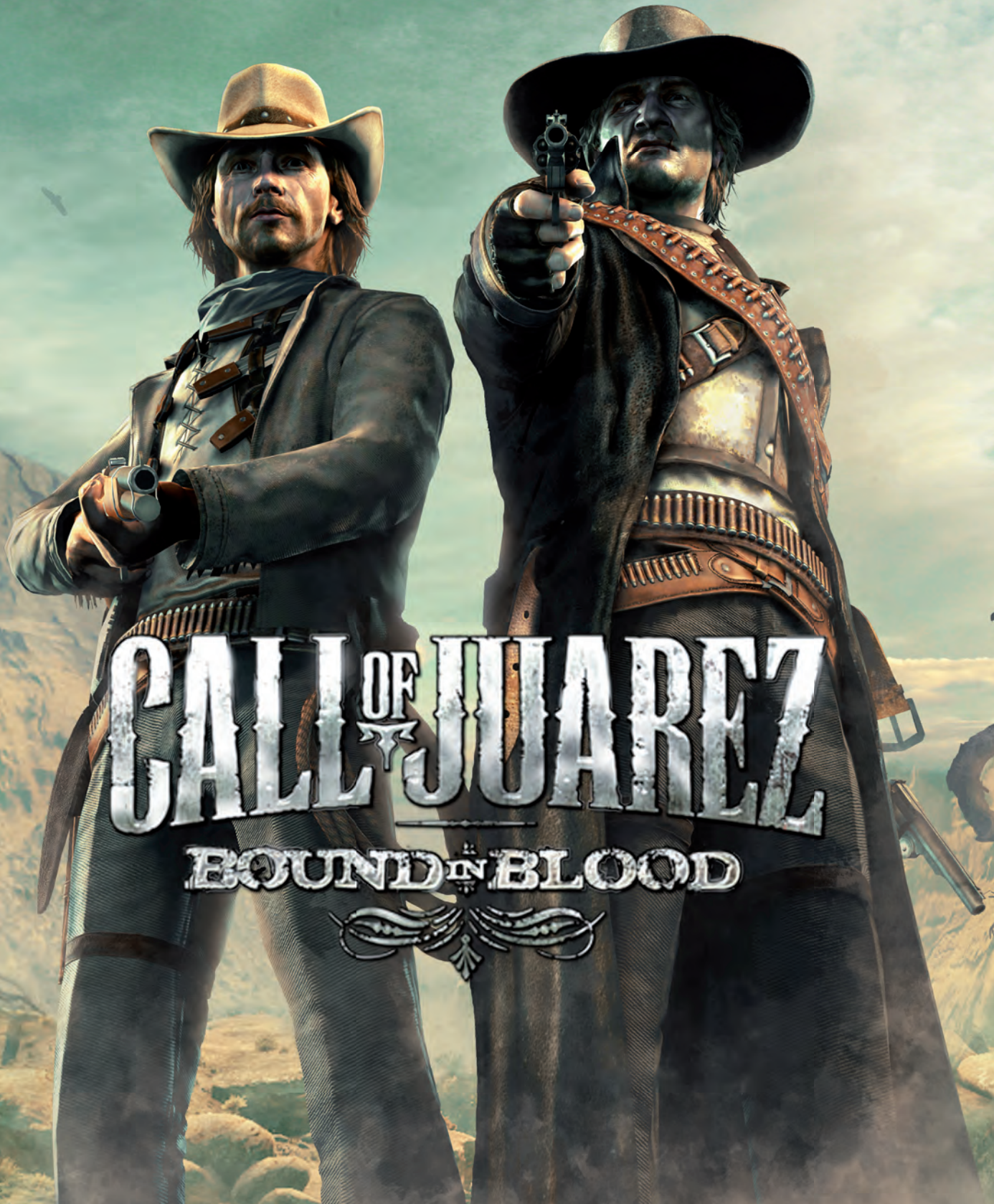


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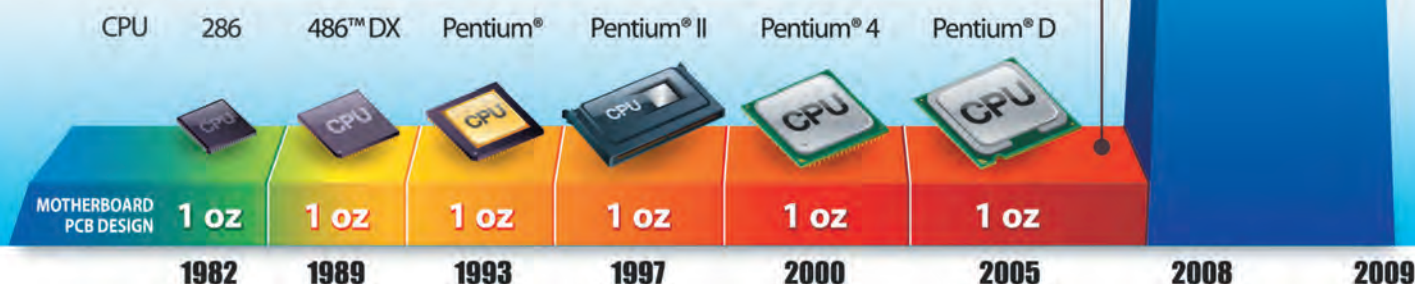
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